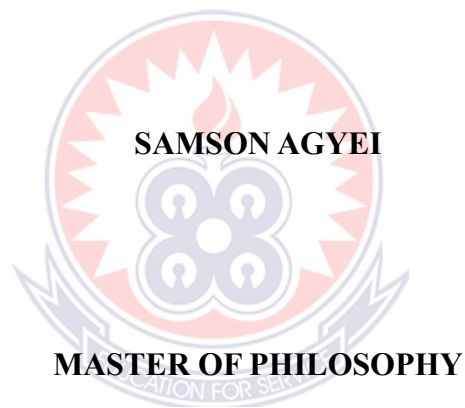


**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**Exploring communication patterns of marital  
Stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality**



**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**EXPLORING COMMUNICATION PATTERNS OF MARITAL  
STABILITY AMONG COUPLES IN THE BIBIANI MUNICIPALITY**



**A thesis in the Department of Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Applied  
Behavioural Sciences in Education, submitted to the School of  
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
(Counselling Psychology)  
in the University of Education, Winneba**

**SEPTEMBER, 2024**

## DECLARATION

### Student's Declaration

I, Samson Agyei, hereby declare that, with the exception of references contained in published works which have been identified and acknowledged, this work is entirely my original work and it has not been submitted in part or whole for any degree elsewhere.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

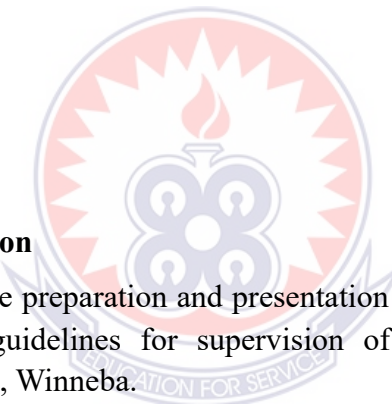
### Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that, the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Prof. George Kankam (Supervisor)

Signature: .....

Date: .....



## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my wife Adelaide Agyei and children, Emmanuel, Mary, Rophina and Nancy, for their forbearance while I was studying.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With a heart filled with gratitude, I am most grateful to God for making it possible for me to finish this project.

Equally, my profound appreciation goes to my supervisor, Professor George Kankam, at the University of Education, Winneba, for his guidance and constructive suggestions.

Many thanks also go to my parents and siblings, not forgetting my friends who contributed in diverse ways towards the success of this work.

Finally, I say a big thank you to Bro. Ben for typesetting this work. I am most grateful.



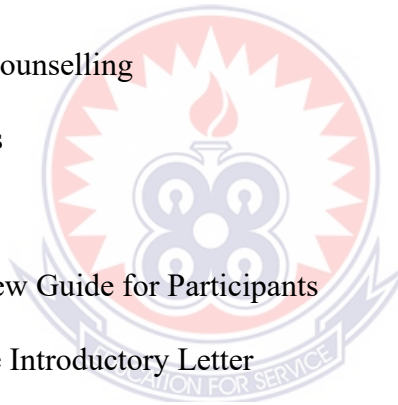
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
DECLARATION	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	x
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	5
1.3 Purpose of the Study	7
1.4 Objectives of the Study	8
1.5 Research Questions	8
1.6 Significance of the Study	8
1.7 Scope of the Study	9
1.8 Limitation of the Study	10
1.9 Operational Definition of Terms	10
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</b>	<b>14</b>
2.0 Introduction	14
2.2 The Conceptual Framework of the Study	18
2.3 The Concept of Marriage	19
2.4 Forms of Marriage in Ghana	20
2.6 Stages of Marriage	23
2.7 Marital Satisfaction	24

2.8	Stability of Marriage	24
2.9	Benefits of Stable Marriage	25
2.9.1	Emotional Benefits	26
2.9.2	Physical Benefits	27
2.9.3	Financial Benefits	27
2.9.4	Cooperative Benefits	27
2.9.5	Familial Benefits	28
2.9.6	Social Benefits	28
2.10	Challenges for Couples Maintaining Long-Term Marriages	28
2.10.1	Lack of Communication	30
2.10.2	Negative Patterns of Behaviour	33
2.10.3	Poor Communication	34
2.10.4	Parenthood	35
2.10.5	Other Detrimental Behaviours	35
2.10.6	Reduced Expression of Affection and Self-Disclosure	35
2.10.7	Inability to Remain Calm and Flexible	36
2.11	Factors Influencing Marriage Stability	36
2.11.1	Commitment	37
2.11.2	Friendship in Marriage	38
2.11.3	Conflict Resolution	38
2.11.4	Effective Communication	39
2.11.5	Personality Characteristics	39
2.11.6	General Factors	40
2.12	Communication Patterns and Marriage Stability	40
2.13	Marital Counselling and Marital Stability	42

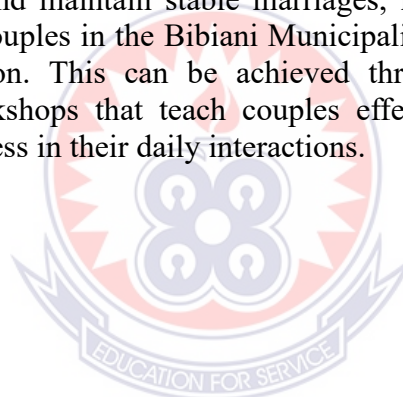
2.13.1 Premarital Counselling	42
2.13.2 Couples Counselling	43
2.14 Summary of Literature Review	43
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>45</b>
3.0 Introduction	45
3.1 Research Paradigm	45
3.2 Research Approach	46
3.4 Setting of the Study	48
3.5 Population	49
3.6 Sample and Sampling Procedures	49
3.7 Data Collection Instrument	51
3.8 Data Collection Procedures	52
3.9 Data Analysis Procedures	53
3.10 Data Saturation	55
3.11 Trustworthiness and Authenticity of the Data	55
3.11.1 Credibility	56
3.11.1 Transferability	59
3.11.2 Dependability	61
3.11.3 Confirmability	61
3.12 Ethical Considerations	62
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>64</b>
4.0 Introduction	64
4.1 Section A: Bio-Data of Participants	64
4.2 Section B: Analysis of Qualitative Data	65

4.3	Discussion of Findings	88
4.3.1	Communication patterns couples exhibit in stable marriages	88
4.3.2	Role of active listening in fostering positive communication among couples	89
4.3.3	Strategies couples adopt to resolve conflicts in marriage	90
4.3.4	Influence of communication on marital stability	91
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		<b>93</b>
5.1	Summary of the Study	93
5.2	Key Findings of the Study	93
5.3	Conclusion	94
5.4	Implications for Counselling	95
5.5	Recommendations	96
REFERENCES		98
APPENDIX A: Interview Guide for Participants		109
APPENDIX B: Sample Introductory Letter		112



## ABSTRACT

The study was undertaken to explore communication patterns among marital couples in the Bibiani Municipality and assess how they affected marital stability. Specifically, the study sought to explore the communication patterns exhibited by couples in stable marriages, examine how ineffective communication patterns manifest among couples experiencing marital instability, explore the role active listening plays in fostering positive communication, and investigate how couples resolve conflicts through communication to foster marriage stability. Grounded in the communication theory of identity, the study adopted a qualitative research approach using the hermeneutic phenomenological design. Twenty-five couples were purposively sampled for the study and data was collected using an interview guide. Data was manually analysed thematically. However, participants' demographic data was analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages. The findings of the study were that, expression of love and honesty were the main communication patterns that couples in stable marriage exhibited in the Bibiani Municipality. Majority of couples in the Bibiani Municipality resolved conflict through open and honest dialogue, non-confrontational communication and setting and respecting boundaries. Following the outcome of the study, it was recommended among other things that, to build and maintain stable marriages, it is important for pastors and imams to encourage couples in the Bibiani Municipality to express love and honesty in their communication. This can be achieved through relationship counselling programmes and workshops that teach couples effective ways to openly express affection and truthfulness in their daily interactions.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Marriage is widely recognized as one of the most important human relationships, providing the foundation for family formation and the upbringing of future generations (Rosen, Myers, & Hattie, 2014). Studies indicate that married individuals often report higher levels of happiness and overall well-being compared to those who are unmarried. However, achieving marital satisfaction is not always straightforward (Rosen et al., 2014). Generally, marriage is understood as a union between a man and a woman, formalized legally and socially to fulfill material, sexual, and psychological needs (Sexton, 2012). Marriages often allow individuals to meet their material and sexual needs more fully than remaining single, while psychological well-being depends on how effectively partners adjust to each other.

The relationship between spouses involves a complex process of emotional and social adjustment, making marital satisfaction a critical component of individual well-being (Pill, 2010). Satisfying marriages contribute to competent parenting, effective problem-solving, and harmonious family functioning. In contrast, unsatisfying marriages may generate stress that undermines family members' ability to adapt and function effectively (Timm, 2015). Marital satisfaction is influenced not only by what occurs within the marriage but also by how partners interpret and respond to these events. In this sense, marital satisfaction can be viewed as a socially constructed reality created by the partners themselves (O'Leary & Smith, 2011). Research suggests that higher marital satisfaction is associated with longer-lasting unions.

Hocker and Wilmott (2015) propose two ways of conceptualizing marital stability. One approach views stability as a global, subjective evaluation of the marriage, while the other links stability to the specific needs fulfilled within married life. This implies that couples often assess the success or failure of their marriage based on the level of satisfaction they experience. Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach (2010) identify social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors as important determinants of marital stability. These include cognitive and emotional functions, behavioral patterns, the presence of conflict or violence, sociodemographic characteristics, life stressors, and broader societal contexts.

Marital stability is essential for the well-being of families and society as a whole. Structural, economic, and cultural changes, such as individualization and modernization, have contributed to increasing marital instability in many societies (Sporakowski & Axelson, 2014). Cultural, religious, and philosophical perspectives on the permanence of marriage vary widely (Piper, 2009; Stahmann, 2019), yet marriage remains a universal institution, with forms and expressions shaped by cultural and social contexts (Byers, 2015). In African traditions, marriage is often considered sacred, lifelong, and exclusively between a man and a woman (Oyewale, 2016). However, migration and globalization have influenced marital experiences, especially among diaspora populations (Butzer & Campbell, 2015; Brubaker & Roberto, 2019).

Despite aspirations for longevity, marital instability has become increasingly common, presenting a social challenge worldwide. All marriages are subject to internal and external pressures, and instability often leads to separation, divorce, or widowhood, particularly in developing countries (Khan, 2016; Offei, 2017). This

prevalence has prompted research into the causes and consequences of marital dissolution, though earlier studies primarily focused on young couples and marriages that ended in divorce (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 2013).

In recent years, research has increasingly focused on marriages that endure over time. Canary, Semic, and Stafford (2012) highlight the importance of marital resilience, which involves maintaining relationships despite daily stressors and challenges through purposeful engagement in activities that sustain and repair the relationship. Fenell (2013) identified ten characteristics of couples married for over twenty years, including lifelong commitment, loyalty, moral integrity, mutual respect, sexual fidelity, dedication to parenting, spiritual engagement, willingness to forgive, supportiveness, and companionship. Similarly, Goodman (2015) found that intimacy, defined as sharing experiences and prioritizing the partner's well-being, was a strong predictor of marital satisfaction, while autonomy, or respecting individual interests, did not significantly predict marital longevity.

Long-term happy marriages provide multiple benefits, including higher life satisfaction, better mental and physical health, and emotional stability (Gove, Style, & Hughes, 2010; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 2013; Murray, 2010). In contrast, unhappy or dissolved marriages can negatively impact well-being, leading to lower happiness, reduced self-esteem, and greater psychological distress (Garcia, 2013; Amato, 2010).

Similarly, children of highly distressed or divorced couples may experience negative consequences including poorer school achievement, psychological adjustment, and relationships with each parent (Amato, 2010; Amato & Keith, 2011a; Amato & Keith, 2011b). It was upon this bedrock that the study sought to explore how communication

patterns affect marital stability among couples in Bibiani and the implications for counselling. Communication patterns play a crucial role in marital stability and the overall health of a relationship between couples. Effective communication is often cited as one of the key factors in maintaining a strong, stable marriage. Couples who engage in positive communication, which includes expressions of affection, compliments, and active listening, tend to have more stable relationships. They focus on the strengths of their partner and their relationship rather than dwelling on negative aspects. Couples who can navigate conflicts constructively without resorting to criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stonewalling are more likely to have stable marriages. They use conflict as an opportunity for growth in the relationship rather than a battleground. Sharing thoughts, feelings, and concerns openly and honestly with a partner without fear of judgment or retribution is a hallmark of stable relationships. Trust is built through consistent, honest communication.

Demonstrating empathy and striving to understand the partner's perspective helps in creating a supportive environment. Acknowledging each other's feelings and viewpoints fosters closeness and stability. Couples who can work together to solve problems and make decisions collaboratively tend to have more stable relationships. They approach challenges as a team rather than as adversaries. Listening attentively to a partner, without interrupting or planning a response, shows respect and value for their thoughts and feelings. This can strengthen the bond between partners and lead to greater stability. It is natural for couples to have disagreements, but how they handle these disagreements can affect the stability of their marriage.

Respectful communication, even during arguments, is key to maintaining a healthy relationship. Nonverbal cues such as eye contact, body language, and physical touch

can communicate love and affection without words. Positive nonverbal communication can enhance marital stability. Couples who regularly check in with each other about their relationship, personal goals, and feelings are more likely to maintain a stable connection. These check-ins can prevent small issues from turning into larger problems. Being able to adapt to changes and communicate about new situations is important for the longevity of a marriage. Couples who can navigate life's transitions together and communicate effectively during these times are more likely to remain stable. To this end, Burns (2012) postulated that couples in successful marriages engage in regular expression of affection, such as verbal affirmation, physical touch, and spending quality time together.

It is important to note that while these communication patterns are associated with marital stability, they are not guarantees. Every relationship is unique, and couples may face a variety of challenges that affect their stability. Additionally, communication is just one aspect of a relationship; other factors such as shared values, mutual respect, and external stressors also play significant roles in marital stability. Couples who struggle with communication may benefit from seeking professional help, such as couples therapy, to improve their communication skills and strengthen their relationship. Unfortunately, couples in the Bibiani Municipality appear to have little or no access to professional help to strengthen their relationship, considering the staggering number of divorce cases recorded at the judicial service department in the Municipality.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Communication has long been identified as one of the most critical determinants of marital stability and satisfaction (Gottman & Silver, 2015). Effective communication

fosters understanding, trust, and emotional connection between partners, while providing a foundation for healthy conflict resolution. Conversely, poor communication patterns—such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling—erode trust, escalate conflicts, and often predict marital dissatisfaction and eventual breakdown (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2017). Research across cultural contexts consistently shows that couples who cultivate open dialogue and active listening are more likely to enjoy stable and fulfilling marriages compared to those who rely on ineffective communication strategies (Carroll, Knapp, & Holman, 2019).

Within the Ghanaian context, marriage is highly valued as a social and cultural institution central to family stability and communal life. Yet, increasing rates of marital conflict, separation, and divorce have been partly attributed to poor communication among couples (Amato, 2010; Osei-Tutu, 2021). Osei-Tutu (2021) found that ineffective communication, particularly criticism, lack of active listening, and poor conflict management was a leading cause of marital instability in Ghanaian communities. Similarly, Agyemang (2020) observed that communication breakdowns frequently result in unresolved conflicts, weakened emotional bonds, and diminished trust between spouses, ultimately undermining marital harmony. These issues have far-reaching social implications. Marital instability often leads to single-parent households, which are associated with poverty, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, school dropouts, and indiscipline among children (Fowers, 2013; Agim, 2017). Indeed, statistics suggest that Ghana's divorce rate now ranges between 30–40% (Amoah, 2018), with the Bibiani Municipality alone recording a steady rise in divorce cases: 60 in 2021, 80 in 2022, and 100 in 2023, according to records from DOVVSU and the Judicial Service Department.

Despite the strong evidence linking communication to marital stability, several gaps persist in the literature. Much of the Ghanaian research on marriage longevity has concentrated on large urban centers such as Accra and Kumasi (Oppong, Asante, Osafo & Nyamekye, 2014; Offei, 2017; Amoah, 2018), often neglecting smaller municipalities like Bibiani, where unique socio-cultural norms, economic pressures, and family dynamics may shape communication differently. Moreover, existing qualitative studies have tended to focus narrowly on specific socio-economic or religious groups, limiting the generalizability of their findings. In addition, many of these studies lacked a clear theoretical framework, which restricted the depth and interpretive power of their analyses.

If this problem is not addressed, the consequences will be severe both at the family and societal level. Continued poor communication between couples in Bibiani will not only perpetuate high divorce rates but also fuel the cycle of family disintegration, single parenting, and the breakdown of social cohesion. Children raised in unstable marital environments are more likely to suffer emotional insecurity, poor academic performance, and behavioral problems (Amato, 2010). On a broader scale, marital instability contributes to the erosion of moral values, increased juvenile delinquency, and the weakening of the social fabric, thereby hindering sustainable community development. Given the rising cases of marital instability in Bibiani and the limited empirical attention to communication patterns in this locality, there is a pressing need for context-specific research.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore communication patterns of marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives were formulated for the study:

1. To explore the communication patterns exhibited by couples in stable marriages in the Bibiani Municipality.
2. To examine how ineffective communication patterns manifest among couples experiencing marital instability in the Bibiani Municipality.
3. To explore the role active listening plays in fostering positive communication among couples in the Bibiani Municipality.
4. Investigate how couples resolve conflicts through communication in the Bibiani Municipality.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the communication patterns exhibited by couples in stable marriages in the Bibiani Municipality?
2. How do ineffective communication patterns manifest among couples experiencing marital instability in the Bibiani Municipality?
3. What role does active listening plays in fostering positive communication among couples in the Bibiani Municipality?
4. How do couples resolve conflicts through communication in the Bibiani Municipality?

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The study will be significant in the following ways:

In theory, studying communication patterns in marriages is essential as communication is an integral part of any relationship, including marriage. Effective

communication can lead to a better understanding between partners, can help resolve conflicts, and can strengthen the bond between them. Conversely, poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and ultimately to the breakdown of the marriage.

In practice, understanding communication patterns in marriages can help couples identify areas of improvement in their communication style. By recognizing and addressing any ineffective communication patterns, couples can work towards improving the quality of their interactions. This can ultimately lead to a more stable and fulfilling marital relationship.

From a policy perspective, research on communication patterns in marriages can inform the development of interventions and programmes aimed at improving marital stability. By understanding the factors that contribute to successful communication in marriages, policymakers can design strategies to support couples in enhancing their communication skills and ultimately strengthening their relationships

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The study was delimited to communication patterns and how they foster marriage stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality. This became imperative as the researcher sought to understand the role that communication plays in fostering or undermining marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality. The Municipality presents a culturally rich context where traditional values coexist with contemporary influences, making a compelling setting for examining marital dynamics. The study focused on how different forms of communication affect the strength and stability of marital relationships in this context.

## 1.8 Limitation of the Study

In the course of the study, the researcher encountered several limitations, and cardinal among them was the fact that some couples were unwilling to discuss personal marital issues, leading to difficulty in recruiting a diverse and representative sample for the study. However, this did not have any significant effect on the outcome of the study. In addition, the use of a purely qualitative approach limited the study's ability to generalize findings to the wider population, as the focus was on in-depth exploration rather than broad statistical representation. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size of twenty-five couples constrained the extent to which the findings could be generalized beyond the study context.

## 1.9 Operational Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following operational terms have been used:

**Marriage:** A relationship between two members of the opposite sex, husband and wife living together, who are married in socially and legally acceptable way.

**Marital stability:** The ability of a marriage to endure and thrive over time, characterized by a lasting and harmonious relationship between spouses. It encompasses various factors such as effective communication, mutual understanding, conflict resolution skills, and overall satisfaction within the marital union.

**Communication patterns:** The ways in which individuals interact, express thoughts, share emotions and resolve conflict.

**Active listening:** this refers to a communication technique where one partner fully concentrates, understands, responds to, and remembers what the other partner is saying.

**Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of either of the couple. It involves recognizing emotions in others and responding with care and concern.

**Love:** A complex set of emotions, behaviours and beliefs associated with strong feelings of attention, protectiveness, warmth and respect for either of the couple.

**Honesty:** The quality of being truthful, sincere and free from deceit. It involves expressing one's thoughts and feelings openly and authentically.

**Emotional disconnect:** A state where couples feel detached or disengaged from each other's emotions, leading to feelings of isolation or misunderstanding.

**Perceived aggressiveness:** The interpretation of a partner's behaviour as hostile or confrontational, which can lead to defensive reactions and communication breakdowns.

**Misunderstanding:** A failure to understand something correctly, often leading to confrontation or conflict in communication.

**Mixed signals:** Inconsistent or ambiguous messages sent during communication, causing confusion about the sender's intentions or feelings.

**Dominance:** The exertion of power and control over a partner, often leading to imbalanced relationships and potential conflicts.

**Mutual respect:** Reciprocal recognition of each partner's value and feelings, promoting a positive and collaborative relationships.

**Validation:** Acknowledging and accepting another person's thoughts, feelings, or behaviours as understandable, which can enhance connection and trust.

**Strengthened bonds:** The deepening of connections between couples resulting in more resilient and fulfilling relationship.

**Open and honest dialogue:** Communication where couples freely express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgement, promoting transparency and trust.

**Non-confrontational communication:** Approaches to interaction that avoid aggression and hostility, focusing instead on peaceful and constructive dialogue.

**Respecting boundaries:** Recognizing and honoring the personal limits and comfort zones of partners, which is essential for healthy relationships.

**Collaborative problem-solving:** A process where couples work together to find mutually acceptable solutions to shared problems, enhancing cooperation and understanding.

**Strengthened bonds:** The deepening of communications between couple resulting in more resilient and fulfilling relationships.

### **1.10 Organisation of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, operational definition of terms and organisation of the study. Chapter Two primarily reviews literature relevant to the study, while Chapter Three deals with the methodology employed in carrying out the study. This includes the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling technique, data collection instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, data saturation, trustworthiness of data, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents results and

discussions, while Chapter Five presents the summary of key findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

A literature review can be described as an evaluation, overview and description of previous research or topic. The purpose of this literature review is to explore how communication patterns affect marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality. Literature, therefore, was reviewed under the following subheadings:

1. Theoretical Framework
2. The Conceptual Framework
3. The Concept of Marriage
4. Forms, Types and Stages of Marriages
5. Marital Satisfaction
6. Stability of Marriage
7. Benefits of Stability of Marriage
8. Challenges Facing Couples Staying Together
9. Factors Influencing Marriage Stability
10. Communication Patterns and Marriage Stability
11. Marital Counselling and Marital Stability
12. Summary of Literature Review

#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

##### **The Communication Theory of Identity**

Marital stability is a crucial aspect of maintaining a healthy and successful relationship. Communication plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of a marriage, and the Communication Theory of Identity provides valuable insights into how communication patterns can influence marital stability. This theory emphasizes

the role of communication in constructing and maintaining one's identity within a relationship.

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), developed by Michael Hecht in 1993, conceptualizes identity as a multifaceted construct experienced across four interrelated frames: personal, enacted, relational, and communal. This theory posits that identity is not only an individual's self-concept but also how it is expressed, perceived in relationships, and shared within communities. In 2021, Kimberly Kuiper proposed an extension to CTI by introducing a fifth frame -the material frame. This addition emphasizes the role of physicality in identity, encompassing aspects such as the body, health, and territory. Kuiper argued that physical elements are integral to identity formation and expression, thereby enriching the original theory's scope.

Applying CTI to the study of communication patterns and marital stability among adults offers valuable insights:

1. **Personal Frame:** Each partner's self-concept influences their communication behaviors. Understanding individual identities can shed light on personal expectations and communication styles within the marriage.
2. **Enacted Frame:** The ways partners express their identities through communication affect marital interactions. Examining these expressions can reveal how identity enactment contributes to marital satisfaction or discord.
3. **Relational Frame:** Identities are co-created within the marital relationship. Exploring how partners perceive each other's identities and the relationship itself can provide insights into relational dynamics and stability.

4. Communal Frame: Shared identities within cultural or social groups influence marital norms and expectations. Investigating these communal aspects can help understand external factors impacting marital stability.
5. Material Frame: Physical aspects, such as health and shared spaces, play a role in marital dynamics. Considering the material frame can offer a holistic view of factors affecting communication patterns and stability.

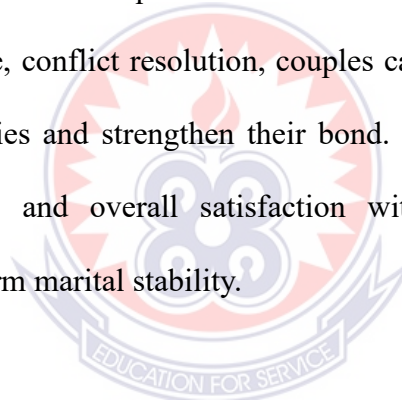
By understanding the key points of this theory, we can explore how communication patterns impact marital stability. The communication theory of Identity, developed by Michael Hecht in 1993, focuses on how communication shapes and influences an individual's sense of self within a relational context. It suggests that individuals construct their identities through communication and that these identities are constantly evolving and negotiated within relationships.

Within a marital relationship, partners engage in on-going identity negotiation. This involves the exchange of messages that shape and refine each partner's sense of self. Effective communication patterns that promote open dialogue, active listening, and empathy can facilitate successful identity negotiation, leading to greater marital stability. Self-disclosure is a crucial aspect of communication within a marriage. It involves sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with one's partner. When partners engage in open and honest self-disclosure, it fosters trust, intimacy, and a deeper understanding of each other's identities. This, in turn, contributes to marital stability.

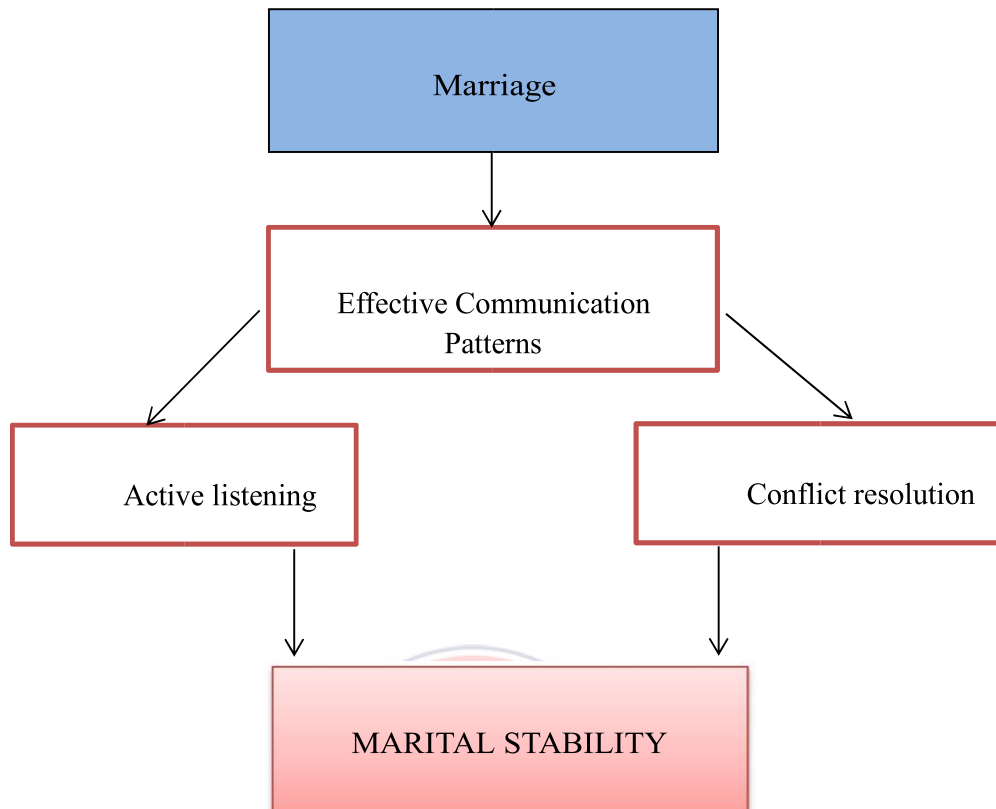
Communication patterns during conflict play a significant role in determining marital stability. Constructive communication techniques, such as active listening, expressing emotions without aggression, and finding mutually beneficial solutions, can help

resolve conflicts effectively. These patterns promote understanding, respect and compromise, which are essential for maintain a stable marital relationship. Effective communication patterns also involve providing emotional support to one's partner. By actively listening, validating emotions and offering empathy, partners can create a supportive environment within the marriage. This emotional support contributes to marital stability by fostering a sense of security, trust and overall satisfaction within the relationship.

In conclusion, it can be said that, the Communication Theory of Identity highlights the importance of communication patterns in shaping marital stability. By engaging in effective communication techniques such as identity negotiation, and emotional support, self-disclosure, conflict resolution, couples can enhance their understanding of each other's identities and strengthen their bond. These communication patterns foster trust, intimacy, and overall satisfaction within the marriage, ultimately contributing to long-term marital stability.



## 2.2 The Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: (Author's own)

The framework refers to the positive communication behaviour exhibited by couples in stable marriages. Effective communication may involve being opinion, honest and respectful during conversation, expressing feelings clearly, and avoiding negative communication patterns like aggressiveness or defensiveness. When couples communicate effectively, it creates an environment of trust and mutual respect. This is the foundation upon which other positive behaviours like active listening and conflict resolution are built.

The framework also shows a cause and effect relationship. Effective communication patterns lead to better active listening and conflict resolution, which in turn brings about marital stability. It illustrates how essential communication behaviours are to a

strong marriage. By focussing on how couples talk to, listen to, and resolve issues with each other, we can understand why some marriages remain stable while others experience instability. Each component feeds into the next, highlighting the interconnectedness of communication and marital health.

### **2.3 The Concept of Marriage**

Marriage is widely recognized as a formal union between individuals that establishes a family unit, granting partners both rights and responsibilities that may be recognized legally, socially, or religiously. This institution can take various forms, including opposite-sex, same-sex, polygamous, and arranged marriages. In many contexts, marriage involves a man and a woman leaving their respective families to create a new household together.

Marriage plays a unique role in ensuring the care and upbringing of children, as it encourages the participation of both parents in the family unit. It also functions to protect and sustain caring interpersonal relationships. In Ghana, traditional perspectives on marriage remain influential, emphasizing a lifelong commitment between a husband and wife, guided by legal, customary, and religious norms.

Marriage is often viewed as a social institution that brings together two individuals with differing personalities, backgrounds, and life experiences. After marriage, couples undergo a period of adjustment, which requires compromise and negotiation to maintain the relationship. Marital adjustment refers to the ability of partners to achieve satisfaction and harmony in their relationship. This adjustment is influenced by a variety of factors, including personality compatibility, communication patterns, and shared values.

Despite its benefits, marriage can also be a source of stress and emotional challenges. Increasingly, couples experience conflict, misunderstandings, and dissatisfaction, which may contribute to a rise in divorce rates within relatively short periods of marriage. The ability of couples to navigate these challenges successfully is often linked to their resilience, communication skills, and commitment to the partnership.

## **2.4 Forms of Marriage in Ghana**

In Ghana, there are three recognized forms of marriage: customary marriages, marriages under the Mohammedan Ordinance, and marriages under the Marriage Ordinance.

### **a. Customary Marriage**

Customary marriage is based on Ghanaian traditional law and was historically the only legally recognized form of marriage until 1884. These unions typically involve the coming together of two families, and polygyny is allowed, permitting a man to have multiple wives simultaneously. Customary marriages often begin with a ceremonial payment of bride price, which may be returned if the marriage ends in divorce. Divorce under customary law may also involve compensation depending on the circumstances, such as misconduct by one spouse. Property acquired during the marriage is generally considered separate, and dissolution in court is possible but uncommon.

### **b. Marriage under the Mohammedan Ordinance**

Islamic marriages in Ghana must be registered under the Mohammedan Ordinance to be recognized legally. Men may have up to four wives under this system, reflecting the allowances in the Qur'an. Divorce is possible if both spouses consent; otherwise, the wife may only seek judicial intervention under specific conditions. Property

division upon divorce is rarely documented, and settlements are often managed privately between the spouses.

### **c. Marriage under the Marriage Ordinance**

Marriage under the Ordinance is formalized through registration at a church or marriage office. Unlike customary or Islamic marriages, polygyny is not permitted under this system. The courts may dissolve an Ordinance marriage if it has irretrievably broken down, and property acquired during the marriage can be divided under judicial discretion. The existence of multiple marital forms in Ghana has implications for property rights and family law. International bodies, such as CEDAW, have urged the Ghanaian government to create uniform legislation to ensure consistency and fairness in marriage and family matters.

## **2.5 Types of Marriages**

Scholars and marital experts have classified marriages based on the level of satisfaction, behavioral patterns, and stability within the relationship. Generally, marital relationships can be grouped into three broad categories: successful and fulfilling marriages, mediocre marriages, and conflict-oriented marriages.

### **Successful and Fulfilling Marriages**

A successful and fulfilling marriage is characterized by effective communication, compromise, and collaborative conflict resolution. Couples in such marriages actively listen to one another and strive to understand each other's perspectives. Researchers describe these marriages as dynamic, continuously adapting to new challenges and stages in life. Within this category, two subtypes have been identified. The "vital marriage" emphasizes strong emotional connection and depth of shared experiences, while the "total marriage" represents an even more profound emotional bond and an

enhanced ability to overcome difficulties together. These marriages reflect an ongoing process of growth and mutual support, fostering long-term satisfaction.

### **Mediocre Marriages**

Mediocre marriages exhibit lower levels of satisfaction or engagement but often endure over time. These marriages may take various forms. Some involve low stability and satisfaction, while others maintain stability despite limited emotional closeness. Couples in conflict-avoidant marriages may choose to “agree to disagree,” focusing only on the positive aspects of the relationship. Other types include romantic marriages, driven by passion but susceptible to overdependence; rescue marriages, based on emotional healing; companionate marriages, grounded in friendship and equality; and traditional marriages, emphasizing clearly defined roles often centered on parenting. Additionally, devitalized marriages start with strong emotion but gradually lose connection, and passive-congenial marriages are marked by routine and minimal emotional intensity. Although less emotionally fulfilling, these marriages can persist for years.

### **Conflict-Oriented Marriages**

Conflict-oriented marriages are marked by frequent disputes, intense arguments, and little regard for understanding the partner’s perspective during conflicts. These marriages are generally unstable and carry a high risk of dissolution. Such relationships may involve persistent volatility, where disagreements dominate interactions and undermine emotional connection, making long-term stability difficult.

## **2.6 Stages of Marriage**

Marriage is not static; relationships evolve over time as couples face new challenges and life stages. Scholars identify several stages that reflect changes in responsibilities, needs, and interactions.

### **Early Marriage**

The early years of marriage are crucial for establishing a solid relational foundation. Couples often experience idealization and excitement, yet this stage is also when marriages are most vulnerable to ending. Common stressors include managing debt, balancing work and marital responsibilities, and adjusting to new roles as partners. Satisfaction during this stage often derives from respect, commitment, affection, and trust. The arrival of children introduces new responsibilities, and couples who establish stability early are more likely to maintain long-term marital satisfaction.

### **Midlife Marriage**

In midlife, couples transition from early idealization to navigating the realities of family life, finances, and work demands. Communication patterns become more established, and couples often adopt cooperative strategies for managing conflicts. This stage may involve caring for aging parents, adjusting to health changes, dealing with adolescent children, and planning for retirement. Financial responsibilities, sexual intimacy, and evolving family dynamics, including adult children returning home, are additional challenges. Successful midlife marriages are marked by adaptability, shared responsibilities, and efforts to maintain emotional closeness despite these pressures.

## **2.7 Marital Satisfaction**

Marital satisfaction refers to the degree to which partners feel content and fulfilled within their marriage. The concept has been defined in numerous ways, often overlapping with terms such as happiness, adjustment, stability, and relationship quality. Timm (2015) notes that marital satisfaction is sometimes used interchangeably with these concepts, reflecting the overall sense of well-being within a marital relationship. Similarly, Brody, Litvin, Albert, and Hoffman (2014) described marital quality as encompassing adjustment, stability, and overall satisfaction in life with one's partner.

Some scholars focus on the alignment between expectations and experiences in the marriage. Fıçiloğlu and Demir (2010) define relationship satisfaction as the extent to which spouses' desires and expectations match their actual experiences in the marriage. Khan (2016) expanded this by describing marital satisfaction as the degree of agreement between partners on important matters, satisfaction with emotional and sexual intimacy, the presence of tension, consideration of ending the relationship, shared activities, and attitudes toward the relationship.

Marital satisfaction is inherently complex, influenced by the frequency and intensity of conflicts, the quality of shared activities, and overall happiness within the relationship (Fıçiloğlu & Demir, 2010). In essence, it encompasses both contentment with the partner and with the marriage as a whole, highlighting the relational and emotional dynamics that define a successful marital bond.

## **2.8 Stability of Marriage**

Long-term marital stability is characterized by high levels of adjustment, emotional intimacy, and companionship developed over years of shared experiences (Johnson et

al., 2016). Couples in enduring marriages often display greater cohesion and interdependence, which enables them to navigate challenges associated with aging, illness, and life transitions more effectively (Shiota & Levenson, 2017).

Although physical changes, such as hormonal shifts or medication effects, may influence sexual activity in older age, research suggests that most healthy adults maintain sexual engagement well into later life (Kaplan, 2010; Kamp et al., 2013). Conflicts tend to decline in long-term marriages, partly due to personality similarities and greater mutual understanding (Levenson et al., 2013; Shiota & Levenson, 2017). When disagreements arise, they are often managed with humor or teasing rather than open confrontation, demonstrating adaptive coping mechanisms developed over time (Johnson et al., 2016).

Changes in marital roles also influence stability. Husbands may shift from more patriarchal tendencies toward collaborative or yielding approaches, while wives may either accept or challenge authority in various ways, sometimes showing nurturing leadership (Huyck & Gutmann, 2012). Marriage remains a normative and significant relationship in middle and old age, providing emotional support, security, and a sense of shared future (Schmitt, Kliegel & Shapiro, 2017; Appleton & Bohm, 2011). For older adults, marriage continues to offer a unique dyadic connection with few substitutes, highlighting its enduring social and emotional importance (Johnson et al., 2016).

## **2.9 Benefits of Stable Marriage**

While some critics argue that marriage can have negative consequences, particularly for women (Stacey, 2011), many researchers emphasize that stable, close relationships contribute significantly to personal well-being (Amato, 2010; Corrigan & Phelan,

2014). Amato (2010) highlights the importance of human connections by noting that we rely on others not only for physical support but also for emotional and intellectual growth. Similarly, Waite and Gallagher (2010) argue that marriage can positively transform behavior and life goals, providing profound benefits.

Although unhealthy or unsatisfying marriages can be a source of stress, well-functioning marriages are associated with numerous advantages (Lauer & Lauer, 2016). Ross (2015) observed that the positive effects of marriage on well-being are consistent across different populations and cannot be solely attributed to selective pairing of psychologically healthier individuals. Stable marriages provide built-in support systems that help partners navigate life challenges, often resulting in improved happiness, health, and financial security compared to unmarried individuals (Driver & Gottman, 2014; Waite & Gallagher, 2010; Lauer & Lauer, 2016).

### **2.9.1 Emotional Benefits**

Stable marriages offer strong emotional support, enhancing mental and psychological health for both partners (Simon, 2012; Horwitz, White & Howell-White, 2016). Emotional intimacy in marriage is linked to greater sexual satisfaction and lower stress levels (Waite, 2015; Waite & Gallagher, 2010). Couples in successful marriages typically engage in consistent expressions of affection, including verbal affirmations, physical touch, and quality time together (Essuman, 2010).

Marriage also allows partners to share responsibilities and make joint decisions, leading to higher productivity and more manageable life tasks (Gilford, 2018). In addition, committed partnerships provide a space for nurturing love, play, and humor, fulfilling lifelong emotional needs (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2015). Social recognition

and status associated with civil marriage further add to the emotional benefits of stable unions (Sanger, 2016).

### **2.9.2 Physical Benefits**

Married individuals often enjoy better physical health due to mutual care and support (Pill, 2010). Statistically, married people have lower mortality rates and exhibit healthier behaviors compared to those who are single or divorced (Gilford, 2018). Marriage is also associated with reduced engagement in risky behaviors, such as excessive drinking or drug use (Umberson, 2018), contributing to overall longevity and well-being.

### **2.9.3 Financial Benefits**

Marriage can enhance financial stability and efficiency. Two partners living together can share expenses, making housing, utilities, and other costs more manageable. Married couples are often more likely to save, invest in property, support children's education, and acquire assets such as homes and vehicles (Waite, 2015). Research indicates that married households generally report higher income, stronger economic security, and lower financial stress (Ross, 2015). Additionally, married individuals may gain access to various legal and government benefits, including pensions, Social Security, and property rights (Sharlin, 2016; Waite, 2015).

### **2.9.4 Cooperative Benefits**

Marriage allows for task specialization, which increases efficiency in household management and other joint activities (Waite, 2015). Each partner can focus on certain responsibilities while relying on the other to handle complementary tasks. Marriage also strengthens social networks and connects individuals to broader communities, offering meaning and support beyond the immediate household. Some

functions, such as childbearing and providing consistent affection, are best performed within a stable marital unit (Popenoe, 2013).

### **2.9.5 Familial Benefits**

Children benefit significantly from stable two-parent households. They tend to receive more supervision, guidance with schoolwork, and emotional support compared to children in single-parent homes (Waite, 2015). Research shows that children raised in two-parent households are more likely to complete high school, have lower teenage pregnancy rates, and experience lower rates of poverty (Waite, 2015; Waite & Gallagher, 2010).

### **2.9.6 Social Benefits**

Marriage also generates advantages for society as a whole. It forms the foundation of stable family units, which contribute to social cohesion and productivity (Popenoe, 2013). Married couples produce goods and provide care not only for their immediate family but also contribute positively to their communities. Marriage encourages social responsibility, influences behavior and decision-making, and carries legal and social recognition, reinforcing public commitment and accountability (Ross, 2015).

### **2.10 Challenges for Couples Maintaining Long-Term Marriages**

With changing demographics, it is expected that the number of long-term marriages will continue to rise. However, there is no single agreement on what constitutes a long-term marriage. Some studies classify marriages as long-term after 20 years, while others consider 55 years or more. Most research focuses on marriages lasting 40 years or longer, typically involving couples aged 60 and above (Sporakowski & Axelson, 2014). Noller (2019) noted that passive-aggressive behaviors within

marriage can foster long-term dissatisfaction, as unexpressed resentment and unresolved conflict accumulate over time.

Couples who remain married over decades are often considered survivors. Glick and Norton (2010) observed that only one in five marriages reaches its 50th anniversary. Contemporary couples can expect a marriage to last on average around 48 years (Swenson & Moore, 2015). By age 55, a smaller proportion of women remain married compared to men, and this gap widens among individuals aged 75 and older, where married men constitute 70% of the population while married women make up only 22% (Gilford, 2018). Long-lasting marriages are remarkable not only for enduring both partners' longevity but also for withstanding high divorce rates. While divorce is more common among younger couples, midlife and older adults now account for about 20% of divorces (Whiteman, McHale & Crouter, 2017). It is estimated that up to two-thirds of first marriages may eventually end in divorce (Martin & Bumpass, 2010). Couples who sustain marriages over many decades have generally outlived many peers and successfully navigated marital challenges (Brubaka & Kinsel, 2019).

Despite extensive research on marital satisfaction and communication among newlyweds and middle-aged couples, little attention has been paid to marriages in later life stages, particularly retirement. The dynamics of early marriages cannot simply be applied to elderly couples, as their life experiences, coping strategies, and values often differ significantly (Zietlow & Sillars, 2008). Studying long-term marriages can offer insights into how couples sustain relationships and manage conflicts over time. Understanding these dynamics is critical for exploring sources of

conflict, coping strategies, and the lived experiences of spouses in enduring relationships.

Marriage experts have identified behaviors that can undermine marital stability. Gottman (2016) highlighted four destructive patterns: criticism (attacking a partner's personality or character), defensiveness (counterattacks to defend oneself), contempt (hostile or mocking communication), and stonewalling (withdrawal from communication). Additionally, about 69% of marital conflicts are considered "perpetual issues," ongoing disputes that may never be fully resolved (Gottman et al., 2016).

### **2.10.1 Lack of Communication**

Effective communication is central to marital stability. Halliday (2018) describes communication as the process through which individuals share information, ideas, and emotions, encompassing spoken words, written messages, and nonverbal cues such as body language and tone. In marriages, open and honest communication fosters intimacy, trust, and mutual understanding. Conversely, poor communication—avoiding discussions about finances, withdrawing from conflict (stonewalling), or engaging in hostile interactions—can destabilize the relationship, reducing satisfaction and increasing stress (Huston & Melz, 2014).

Different communication styles affect marital outcomes. Passive communication, where partners avoid expressing opinions or discussing concerns, can create disengagement. Aggressive communication, marked by threats or insults, fosters resentment. Assertive communication, in contrast, allows partners to express themselves respectfully, promoting satisfaction and mutual understanding. Sexton (2012) found that couples employing assertive communication experience higher

levels of marital satisfaction compared to those using passive or aggressive styles. Umberson (2018) emphasized that communication serves as the foundation for all interpersonal relationships, enabling the intentional sharing of emotions, values, and experiences.

Marital communication includes both verbal and nonverbal exchanges, helping partners convey thoughts, feelings, past experiences, and expectations (Twenge et al., 2013). Effective communication strengthens bonds, supports decision-making, and encourages collaborative problem-solving within the family (Piper, 2009). Character traits such as trust, love, honesty, and unity, combined with constructive communication styles, contribute to family stability (Eze, 2012).

Frequent negative interactions can lead to strained relationships (Gandedzie, 2016). Driver and Gottman (2014) emphasized that how couples communicate during conflicts and express affection directly impacts marital outcomes. Good communication skills are crucial for long-lasting relationships, allowing spouses to navigate conflicts and maintain a positive connection (Karney & Bradbury, 2017; Lee, 2011).

Communication is essential for expressing care, managing disputes, and sustaining a healthy marital bond (Flood, 2011). When absent or harmful, communication breakdowns can escalate into verbal humiliation, emotional abuse, and eventually physical abuse. Abusers often use insults or ridicule, targeting their partner's appearance or abilities (Gottman & Silver, 2010). Common sources of marital conflict include unmet needs, self-centeredness, differing preferences, behavioral incompatibilities, and irresponsibility (Brake, 2012).

In Nigeria, marital conflict and spousal violence linked to communication patterns have been reported at alarming levels. Eze (2012) found that approximately one-third of women experience physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, primarily from their husbands. This high prevalence can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, which often positions women as subordinate within familial and social hierarchies. Common forms of abuse arising from poor communication include shouting at a wife (93%), slapping or pushing (77%), and punching or kicking (40%). Alarmingly, many women may not even recognize such behavior as abusive, likely because certain acts of aggression are normalized within the cultural context.

The increasing rates of marital conflict and divorce have driven researchers to explore strategies for reducing spousal abuse and promoting healthier interactions. Effective communication equips couples with the skills to manage emotions, understand each other's perspectives, express empathy, negotiate disagreements, and respond constructively to marital challenges and irrational behaviors (Eze, 2012). Murray (2010) emphasized that the ability to apologize, demonstrate unconditional positive regard, appreciate one another, and extend forgiveness relies on communication skills such as empathy, self-control, and a nuanced understanding of human needs and emotions (Sporakowski & Hughston, 2012). Conversely, the absence of effective communication often leads to disunity, conflict, and deterioration of the marital relationship (Eze, 2012; Jose & Alfons, 2017).

In contemporary societies where divorce is increasingly common, prioritizing communication between spouses is crucial. Many marital problems could be prevented or resolved through deliberate and effective communication. Kaplan (2010) asserted that no marriage can thrive without strong communication, particularly in a

context where divorce rates are high. Developing effective communication requires intentional practice and effort, as it underpins conflict resolution, mutual understanding, and overall marital stability. Research consistently shows a strong correlation between communication skills, conflict management, and marital adjustment, including the likelihood of divorce (Christensen, Eldridge, Catta-Preta, Lim, & Santagata, 2016).

Unresolved conflicts remain a leading cause of divorce (Egeci & Genz, 2005). Studies in Iran by Duncan, Wilkerson, and England (2016) identified several common factors contributing to divorce, including poor communication skills, disputes over roles and responsibilities, verbal and physical abuse by the husband, and a lack of social skills. Among these, communication problems were highlighted as the most significant factor in Falavarjan, Iran. Insufficient communication leads to family dysfunction, higher stress levels for couples, and reduced marital satisfaction. Both positive and negative communication interactions directly influence the health of the marriage. How couples argue, as well as the expression of affection, has been shown to be critical in determining marital outcomes, affecting both satisfaction and stability.

### **2.10.2 Negative Patterns of Behaviour**

Certain behavioural patterns are strongly associated with marital instability and the risk of divorce. Gottman (2016) identified examples such as “negative start-up by the wife, refusal of the husband to accept influence from his wife, wife’s reciprocation of low-intensity negativity, and the absence of de-escalation by the husband” (p. 17). Similarly, Karney and Bradbury (2017) found that neuroticism—characterized by negative emotionality—in either spouse reduces marital satisfaction. Shiota and Levenson (2017) further reported that high neuroticism in either partner, as measured

by the NEO Five Factor Inventory, is detrimental to marriage, and that high extraversion in husbands alone can also negatively impact marital stability.

Additionally, Gattis et al. (2014) emphasized that higher neuroticism, lower agreeableness, lower conscientiousness, and reduced positive expressivity are strongly linked to marital dissatisfaction. Personality similarities, especially in conscientiousness and extraversion, were found to predict steeper declines in marital satisfaction over time, particularly during long-term marriages when responsibilities outside the marital relationship peak (Shiota & Levenson, 2017).

### **2.10.3 Poor Communication**

Communication difficulties are a common issue among couples seeking counseling (Miller et al., 2013). Gottman (2014) identified typical communication problems, including denying responsibility, making excuses, mind-reading, cross-complaining, “yes-butting,” repetition, whining, and poor body language. Open communication is critical for the maintenance of long-term marriages, allowing spouses to share needs, concerns, and emotions comfortably (MacKinnon, Lundbald & Hansson, 2014).

Cohort differences, however, may limit open communication among older couples, as those influenced by pre-1960s cultural norms often place less value on self-disclosure. Gordon (2010) noted that open communication requires active listening—not just hearing words, but engaging with the emotional undertones. Failure to do so, especially when one partner dominates discussions, can breed resentment and harm marital stability. Halliday (2018) suggested that transparent and direct communication during disagreements enhances conflict resolution and long-term marital satisfaction. Neff and Karney (2012) warned that passive-aggressive behaviors, such as unspoken resentment, also undermine marital satisfaction over time.

#### **2.10.4 Parenthood**

Parenthood can be particularly stressful and may reduce marital satisfaction. Schramm, Marshall, Harris, and Lee (2015) observed that couples who describe their lives as “hectic” often experience declines in relationship quality. Lillard and Waite (2015) noted that the challenges of raising children, especially when mothers work outside the home (Lee, 2011), can strain marital satisfaction. The number of children may also influence marital dynamics, with negativity increasing and positivity decreasing during the first-born child’s puberty (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2013; Whiteman, McHale & Crouter, 2017). Nonetheless, Angeles (2019) found that in Britain, children may positively affect life satisfaction among married couples.

#### **2.10.5 Other Detrimental Behaviours**

Cohabitation prior to marriage is associated with lower marital quality and higher instability, increasing the likelihood of divorce (Kamp-Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2013; Budinski & Trovato, 2015). Self-centeredness, or prioritizing individual needs over family responsibilities, can further damage marriage (Popenoe, 2013). Shifts toward non-traditional gender role attitudes among wives may also influence marital dynamics (Booth & Amato, 2015). Economic independence has increased women’s capacity to leave unsatisfactory marriages (Popenoe, 2013; Cherlin, 2014). This aligns with Stacey’s (2011) observation that marriage has become less obligatory for women, contributing to rising divorce and single motherhood rates.

#### **2.10.6 Reduced Expression of Affection and Self-Disclosure**

Older couples often report less frequent expression of affection and self-disclosure than younger couples (Zietlow & Sillars, 2008). Effective communication, including conflict management, remains critical for maintaining long-term marital stability

(Lauer & Lauer, 2016). Larson, Anderson, Holman, and Niemann (2015) found that among older marriages, roughly 20% were highly conflicted, 20% were very satisfied with minimal conflict, and the remainder exhibited either apathetic or corrosively conflictual patterns.

Sporakowski and Axelson (2014) highlighted that agreement on problems and mutual understanding positively correlated with marital quality. Many older couples adjusted over time, becoming less demanding, temperamental, or irritable (Stanley, Amato, Johnston & Markman, 2019). Honesty and trust are foundational; marriages built on dishonesty often succumb to suspicion, which erodes stability, even when truthful behavior is later demonstrated.

#### **2.10.7 Inability to Remain Calm and Flexible**

Long-term couples have emphasized the importance of addressing issues rather than attacking one another, and maintaining calmness and flexibility during conflicts (Lauer & Lauer, 2016). In problem-solving communication, older couples tend to use fewer critical-thinking evaluative statements and are less likely to express disagreement compared to younger couples. Zietlow and Sillars (2008) observed that older couples are generally more noncommittal, inexpressive, and less likely to shift between conflict management styles when faced with disagreements. This reduced adaptability can challenge marital stability if not consciously addressed.

#### **2.11 Factors Influencing Marriage Stability**

Although the institution of marriage has evolved, its core function as a relationship that satisfies emotional intimacy, trust, and sexual fulfillment remains unchanged (Fields, 2013). Successful long-term marriages depend on several interrelated factors that nurture commitment, friendship, effective conflict resolution, and adaptive

behaviors. Experts have also emphasized that not all long marriages are healthy; some endure due to fear, economic dependence, or mutual helplessness (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2015; Lauer & Lauer, 2016).

### **2.11.1 Commitment**

Commitment is foundational to sustaining long-term marriages regardless of gender or current marital satisfaction (Fenell, 2013; Harley, 2014). Lauer and Lauer (2016) define commitment as the willingness and determination to navigate difficult times (p. 57). Both satisfied and dissatisfied couples often cite commitment to the marriage and belief in its longevity as reasons for staying together (Sporakowski & Hughston, 2015).

Adams and Jones (2017) describe commitment in three dimensions:

1. Attraction component: Devotion, satisfaction, and love.
2. Moral-normative component: A sense of personal responsibility and recognition of marriage as a social and religious institution.
3. Constraining component: Awareness of social, financial, and emotional costs of relationship termination.

Fenell (2013) extended commitment beyond the spouse to include children, while Huyck and Guttman (2012) emphasized commitment to the relationship itself. Lewis (2019) described commitment as an expression of charity or “Gift-love,” which recognizes and values a spouse despite differences. Commitment requires reassurance, acts of service, persistence during challenging times, hard work, and maintaining an idealized romantic view throughout life’s ups and downs (Canary, Stafford & Semic, 2012; Lauer & Lauer, 2016; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2015). Premarital education has also been associated with stronger marital commitment, higher satisfaction, reduced conflict, and lower divorce risk (Johnston & Markman, 2016).

### **2.11.2 Friendship in Marriage**

Gottman (2016) highlighted that happily married couples often function as good friends. Friendship in marriage involves respect, affection, empathy, and gentle, constructive conflict management. Couples who view each other as friends focus on each other's positive qualities, express compliments, and cultivate acceptance (Appleton & Bohm, 2011; Canary et al., 2012).

Friendship nurtures intimacy, supports joint life goals, and strengthens emotional and sexual bonds (Gottman & Silver, 2010; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2015; Lauer et al., 2016). Couples who enjoy friendship share leisure activities, laughter, physical affection, and companionship, fostering loyalty, honesty, trust, and mutual respect (Fenell, 2013; Gottman, 2014; Kaslow & Robison, 2016; Sharlin, 2016). The presence of a strong friendship helps couples endure life's challenges while maintaining a satisfying and enduring marital relationship.

### **2.11.3 Conflict Resolution**

Conflict is inevitable in marriage, particularly in a society lacking prescriptive norms for marital behavior (Cherlin, 2014). Satisfied long-term couples manage disagreements effectively rather than becoming entrenched in opposition (Gottman, 2014; Lauer & Lauer, 2016). Strategies include reaching consensus on goals, practicing flexibility, compromising, and demonstrating empathy and understanding (Fields, 2013; Gottman et al., 2016; Kaslow & Robison, 2016). Open expression of thoughts, feelings, and concerns fosters mutual understanding and trust (Bloom, 2019).

Effective conflict resolution involves addressing problems without attacking a partner's character, seeking appreciation and understanding in disagreements, and

prioritizing cooperation over competition (Canary et al., 2012; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2016; Gottman et al., 2016). Playfulness, humor, affection, and forgiveness contribute to maintaining marital harmony (Driver & Gottman, 2014; Fenell, 2013). Couples must adapt continuously to meet evolving needs, ensuring that even when conflict arises, the marriage remains supportive and emotionally connected (Fields, 2013; Gottman, 2014).

#### **2.11.4 Effective Communication**

Effective communication is a cornerstone of any successful marriage, requiring both partners to openly express their thoughts and emotions while genuinely striving to understand each other (Burns, 2012). This exchange is most productive within a safe, supportive environment (Appleton & Bohm, 2011; Kaslow & Robison, 2016; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2015; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2016). Sharing feelings and needs as they arise helps prevent unresolved conflicts from accumulating (Gottman et al., 2016).

Building a strong marital foundation involves moving beyond superficial conversations to deeper, more vulnerable discussions that reveal one's authentic self (Harley, 2014). Effective communication also requires attentive listening, reading emotional cues, and observing how a partner responds to life's challenges (Kaslow & Robison, 2016).

#### **2.11.5 Personality Characteristics**

Long-term couples often exhibit personality traits and behaviors that help sustain their relationship through life's challenges (Kaslow & Robison, 2016). However, similarity in personality is not always indicative of marital success. Research suggests that complementary personalities can be advantageous, as diverse traits allow couples to

divide responsibilities efficiently and reduce conflict (Shiota & Levenson, 2017; Murray et al., 2012).

For instance, while one partner handles financial tasks, the other may manage social obligations, creating a balance that minimizes friction. Couples may share similarities in age and education but can influence each other over time, becoming either more alike or more distinct in their personalities (Gattis et al., 2014).

### **2.11.6 General Factors**

Several additional factors contribute to marital stability, albeit to a lesser degree. Financial stability, for example, can influence marital satisfaction, with unhappily married wives sometimes seeking full-time employment, which may paradoxically enhance marital longevity (Schmitt et al., 2017; Schoen, Rogers, & Amato, 2016).

Shared moral values, spiritual commitment, and religious beliefs also support long-term marital stability (Fenell, 2013; Kaslow & Robison, 2016; Sporkowski & Hughston, 2015; Myers, 2016). Recognizing marriage as a sacred institution and maintaining consistent religious practices have been linked to stronger, enduring relationships (Lauer et al., 2016; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar & Swank, 2011).

### **2.12 Communication Patterns and Marriage Stability**

Communication patterns play a pivotal role in sustaining marital stability and promoting healthy relationships (Khan, 2016). Effective communication enables couples to navigate challenges and build trust, intimacy, and mutual understanding. Uriel (2016) identified ten key communication patterns associated with stable marriages:

1. **Positive Communication:** Expressing affection, offering compliments, and practicing active listening fosters stronger relationships. Couples focus on strengths rather than dwelling on negatives.
2. **Conflict Resolution Skills:** Handling disagreements constructively, without criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stonewalling, helps couples grow together rather than fight as adversaries.
3. **Openness and Honesty:** Sharing thoughts and feelings candidly builds trust and reinforces relationship stability.
4. **Empathy and Understanding:** Acknowledging each other's perspectives creates a supportive environment and fosters closeness.
5. **Effective Problem-Solving:** Collaboratively addressing challenges encourages teamwork and strengthens marital bonds.
6. **Active Listening:** Attentively listening without interruption demonstrates respect and value for the partner's thoughts and feelings.
7. **Respectful Disagreements:** Maintaining civility during conflicts supports a healthy relationship.
8. **Nonverbal Communication:** Positive body language, eye contact, and physical touch reinforce love and affection.
9. **Regular Check-Ins:** Periodic discussions about the relationship, personal goals, and emotions prevent small issues from escalating.
10. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Successfully navigating changes and new situations together ensures long-term marital resilience.

These communication patterns collectively contribute to marital satisfaction, minimize conflicts, and promote enduring relationships.

## **2.13 Marital Counselling and Marital Stability**

Marital education and counselling programs are widely recognized as effective strategies for promoting marital stability. According to the American Psychological Association, these programs serve as preventive measures to strengthen marriages before serious issues arise. One notable example is the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), which teaches couples effective communication, problem-solving skills, and strategies for managing conflict, forgiveness, and mutual enjoyment and companionship (Futris, Aholou & Seponski, 2011).

Research on PREP has demonstrated that couples who participate in this program experience higher marital satisfaction, fewer negative interactions, reduced relationship hostility, and lower rates of separation or divorce. Longitudinal studies indicate that couples exposed to PREP prior to marriage maintain higher relationship satisfaction and positive interaction patterns up to five years post-program (Futris et al., 2011). Overall, preventive and intervention programs such as premarital education and couples counselling have been shown to positively influence the trajectory of marital relationships, helping couples to navigate challenges and reduce the likelihood of divorce (Marital Education Programmes Help Keep Couples Together, 2014).

### **2.13.1 Premarital Counselling**

Premarital counselling is a structured approach designed to strengthen relationships before marriage, aiming to build a solid foundation for long-term marital satisfaction and reduce the risk of divorce. Providers of premarital counselling may be secular or faith-based, yet all share the goal of preparing couples for a successful marriage (Stahmann, 2019). The primary objectives of premarital counselling include: facilitating the transition from single to married life, improving marital stability and

satisfaction, enhancing communication skills, nurturing companionship and commitment, fostering intimacy, and developing problem-solving and decision-making skills in areas such as finances and household responsibilities (Stahmann, 2019).

### **2.13.2 Couples Counselling**

Couples counselling, also known as marital counselling, is a therapeutic intervention designed to help couples resolve conflicts and strengthen their relationships (Popenoe, 2013). This form of counselling can guide couples in making informed decisions about whether to repair or restructure their relationship, or, if necessary, separate amicably.

Couples counselling is typically short-term and tailored to the specific needs of each couple. Common issues addressed include divorce concerns, infidelity, anger management, financial stress, substance abuse, parenting conflicts, blended family challenges, sexual issues, and communication difficulties (Stahmann, 2019). By facilitating dialogue and understanding, couples counselling helps partners improve their relationships, foster mutual respect, and resolve conflicts constructively.

### **2.14 Summary of Literature Review**

The literature review revealed that substantial research has been conducted on marital longevity, primarily in Western contexts, with limited studies in Africa, particularly Ghana. Many of the reviewed studies are over a decade old, raising concerns about their relevance to contemporary marital dynamics.

A notable gap in existing research is the predominance of quantitative approaches, which often limit participants' voices and contextual experiences. Most studies relied

on married couples within religious institutions and utilized self-reported surveys or questionnaires, which may introduce bias, as participants might overstate or underreport communication patterns and marital satisfaction. These gaps highlight the need for context-specific research, which forms the basis of the present study. Guided by Hecht's Communication Theory of Identity (1993), this study investigates how individuals construct and convey identities through communication within marital relationships. Specifically, it examines communication dynamics and their influence on marital stability in Bibiani, Ghana.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter focused on the methodology of the study. Sub-headings discussed included the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, trustworthiness of data, data analysis procedures and ethical considerations.

#### 3.1 Research Paradigm

This study was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes that the methods used to generate knowledge in the human and social sciences must differ from those applied in the natural sciences. As Bell (2010) explained, this is because human beings interpret their realities and act based on such interpretations, making their experiences inherently subjective. Unlike the positivist view that seeks universal truths measurable through objective tools, interpretivism is grounded in a relativist ontology, which acknowledges that a single phenomenon can have multiple valid interpretations depending on context, culture, and individual experiences.

The use of the interpretivist paradigm was particularly suitable for this study because the focus was on exploring communication patterns and marital stability among couples in Bibiani Municipality. These issues are highly context-dependent and cannot be reduced to numerical generalizations. Instead, they require careful engagement with the lived experiences of couples to uncover the meanings they attach to communication within their marriages. As Bell (2010) further noted, interpretivist researchers should aim to understand the multiple ways in which people view and

experience their world while minimizing researcher bias. In this regard, the interpretivist stance enabled the researcher to approach the phenomenon holistically, valuing the voices of participants and recognizing that marital stability is influenced by diverse cultural, social, and relational contexts.

Thus, the paradigm provided the philosophical foundation for investigating the phenomenon in depth, ensuring that the findings are authentic to the realities of married couples in Bibiani rather than shaped by assumptions of universality. This justification makes interpretivism the most appropriate paradigm for addressing the study's objectives.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative research approach. A qualitative design was most appropriate because the study sought to explore couples' experiences of communication and its influence on marital stability in their natural settings, without manipulation or interference. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research allows for a rich, in-depth understanding of social phenomena by focusing on meanings, perspectives, and lived experiences. This aligns with the study's purpose of uncovering how couples interpret and experience communication within their marital relationships.

Furthermore, Yin (2014) emphasized that qualitative research must address four critical challenges of research design: (i) identifying the right research questions, (ii) determining what data are relevant, (iii) deciding what data to collect, and (iv) selecting appropriate strategies for data analysis. This study responded to these recommendations by carefully formulating research questions that directly aligned with its objectives, selecting relevant participants who could provide authentic

insights, collecting data through in-depth engagement with married couples, and adopting systematic qualitative analysis techniques.

The qualitative approach was therefore justified as the most effective means of generating rich, contextualized data on communication and marital stability. Unlike quantitative approaches, which often focus on breadth and generalization, qualitative inquiry enabled this study to focus on depth, meaning, and context, thereby producing findings that genuinely reflect the lived realities of couples in Bibiani Municipality.

### **3.3 Research Design**

A hermeneutic phenomenological design was used for the study. Brenda (2015) asserted that, hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on understanding and interpreting the lived experiences of individuals within their specific contexts. Creswell and Creswell (2016) noted that, a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their shared experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Shepherd and Sutcliffe (2011) posited that a theorist must start close to the phenomenon to identify the appropriate construct and Connelly (2009) noted that this helps to provide validity for the study.

The study used hermeneutic phenomenological design because phenomenologists, in contrast to positivists, believe that the researcher cannot be detached from his or her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Creswell, 2016). In this regard, Drummond, Hendry, McLafferty and Pringle (2011) stated that individual researchers “hold explicit beliefs” (p. 121). The intention of this research, at the outset (preliminary focus), was to gather data regarding the perspectives of married couples about the phenomenon of marital stability in the Western North Region. Since the study sought to gather data on how communication patterns affect the

stability of marriages among couples, phenomenological design was found to be the appropriate design to use for the study.

### 3.4 Setting of the Study

The study was conducted in the Bibiani Municipality located in the Western North Region of Ghana. It serves as an important administrative and economic centre in the region. The municipality is known for its rich natural resources, including gold mining, which plays a significant role in its local economy. Agriculture is also a key likelihood for the population, with cocoa farming being predominant. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the population of the Bibiani Municipality is 167,971, having a slightly higher number of females than males. The Bibiani Municipality has a diverse population with various ethnic groups coexisting, and is characterized by traditional values and practices that influence family dynamics and marital relationships. The municipality is served by several health, educational and social institutions, which support its communities in various ways. However, like many areas in Ghana, it faces challenges such as economic pressures and social change, which can impact family stability and communication among couples.



Source: Google map data (2024)

### **3.5 Population**

The population of a study is defined by Lavrankas (2018) as the entire set of units for which the survey data are to be used to make inferences. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) stated that the population is a group to which results of the study are intended to apply. That is, the population to which the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusion. Thus, population defines those units for which the findings of the study are meant to generalize. Gray (2018) referred to a population as the whole set of objects of research about which a researcher wants to determine some characteristics.

In the context of this study, the population comprised all married couples residing in the Bibiani Municipality. This choice is justified because the study sought to explore communication patterns and their influence on marital stability. Since communication within marriage is a relational and context-specific phenomenon, the most appropriate population is married couples who are directly engaged in such dynamics. Focusing on this group provides the opportunity to capture authentic, lived experiences that reflect both the stability and instability of marriages within the municipality. Moreover, given the rising cases of divorce and marital conflict in Bibiani in recent years, it was critical to include the entire population of married couples as the foundation from which the sample was drawn, ensuring that the findings remain relevant and applicable to the realities of the study area.

### **3.6 Sample and Sampling Procedures**

A sample is a sub-group or a representative selection of a population that is examined or tested to obtain statistical data or information about the whole population. The sample size for the study was 25 couples. Creswell and Creswell (2016)

recommended that, 5-25 persons can be sampled when using qualitative research approach. Homogeneous purposive sampling technique was used to select couples who have 10 years' experience in marriage or more. The reason is that the study focused on communication patterns and marital stability; hence, married couples with at least 10 years' experience in marriage were deemed to be in a better position to help address the research objectives; and were therefore, selected for the study. The choice of homogeneous purposive sampling was justified because the study aimed to explore communication patterns and marital stability among long-term couples. As Patton (2015) notes, purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers seek participants with specific characteristics that are essential for answering the research questions. By selecting couples with at least 10 years of marital experience, the study ensured that participants possessed relevant insights, lived experiences, and a depth of understanding regarding long-term marital communication, which would not be available from newly married couples.

For that reason, married couples selected for the study had the needed typologies and characteristics which helped in gathering data so as to address the research objectives. Snowball sampling technique was also used to select participants for the study. The researcher first identified one married person who was married for at least 10 years and still lives with the partner. After a contact with that married person, other 24 married couples were identified with the help of the initial married person identified.

The use of snowball sampling further strengthened the participant recruitment process. In qualitative research, snowball sampling is particularly useful when targeting specific, less accessible populations (Noy, 2008). Long-term married couples fitting the study's criteria may not be easily identifiable in the general

population. By relying on initial participants to recommend others who met the inclusion criteria, the researcher was able to efficiently access a network of suitable participants, thereby ensuring adequate representation of the target group.

### **3.7 Data Collection Instrument**

Structured interview guide was used to collect data for the study. The interview guide was in two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A presented questions that focused on the demographic data of participants, whereas Section B presented questions that help in answering the research questions. Communication patterns and marital stability are context-specific, which implies that standardized instruments may not fully capture the unique dynamics of couples within a particular cultural, social, or economic setting.

To enhance the validity of the instrument, the interview guide was subjected to expert review. Specifically, it was presented to two university lecturers in qualitative research methods and one marriage counselor for evaluation. Their feedback focused on the clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness of the questions. Based on their recommendations, modifications were made to refine ambiguous items and ensure alignment with the study's objectives.

Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with four couples outside the main study area to assess the comprehensibility and flow of the questions. The couples were purposively selected because they shared similar socio-demographic characteristics with the target population in terms of age range, marital status, and cultural background but were not part of the actual study participants. This ensured that they could provide relevant and constructive feedback on the appropriateness and clarity of the questions without influencing or overlapping with the main study sample.

Their selection was also based on their willingness to participate voluntarily and their accessibility to the researcher, making them suitable for pre-testing the instrument. The results of the pilot confirmed that the guide was effective in eliciting rich and meaningful responses, thereby strengthening its content validity.

### **3.8 Data Collection Procedures**

An introductory letter permitting the study was procured from the Administration of the University of Education, Winneba. This letter helped the researcher to convince potential participants to participate in the study. Data collection was carried out at the homes of participants to ensure a natural, familiar, and comfortable environment that would encourage openness and authenticity in responses. Before the commencement of each session, the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the ethical considerations, after which informed consent was obtained. Only participants who provided consent were included in the interviews.

Interviews were conducted in a private and quiet section of each participant's home, free from external distractions, to protect confidentiality and to allow participants to express themselves freely without fear of being overheard. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes, with the first five minutes deliberately dedicated to building rapport and trust. This introductory phase was essential for reducing anxiety and creating a relaxed atmosphere, which in turn promoted more genuine and reflective responses.

A semi-structured interview format was employed, guided by the interview schedule but allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences, perspectives, and meanings. To enhance inclusivity and ensure clear understanding, five

participants were interviewed in the local dialect because they were more comfortable and articulate in their native language. This approach was crucial for obtaining rich, authentic, and contextually nuanced data, as it allowed participants to express themselves without the limitations of a second language (Esposito, 2001). With prior permission, the sessions were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data.

Immediately after each interview, the recordings were played back to participants for member checking, enabling them to verify the accuracy of the responses and clarify any ambiguities. This step enhanced the credibility and dependability of the data while reinforcing participants' confidence in the research process.

### **3.9 Data Analysis Procedures**

This is a process of examining and interpreting the data gathered in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Gray, (2018). In qualitative research, data analysis is done simultaneously with data collection, and occurs both in and out of the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and begins immediately after finishing the first interview or observation (Marshall & Rossman, 2013). Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis; then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes; and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the data was analysed manually using the six-phase guide to doing thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases of thematic analysis identified by Braun and Clarke are; familiarizing with the data,

generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The themes in this study were derived directly from the data and guided by the research questions. The process of theme generation followed the six phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), ensuring rigor and consistency throughout the analysis.

The first phase involved familiarizing with the data, which required becoming deeply immersed in the content. This was achieved by repeatedly listening to the audio-recorded interviews and transcribing them verbatim. The transcripts were cross-checked for accuracy and completeness by replaying the audiotaped data and comparing them with the transcribed text, filling in any missing information. After ensuring accuracy, the transcripts were read multiple times in an active, reflective manner to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, with initial ideas and patterns noted for coding.

In the second phase, systematic coding was undertaken. Interesting and meaningful features of the data relevant to the research questions were identified and coded across the entire dataset. A co-coder was engaged to independently analyze the data, which enhanced the reliability of the coding process. Consensus was then reached through discussion to finalize the codes.

In the third phase, codes were collated into potential themes that captured the essence of the participants' responses. These themes were directly linked to the main research questions, while sub-themes emerged from within each theme to capture finer nuances of participants' experiences.

The fourth and fifth phases involved reviewing and refining the themes. The themes were checked against the coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure that they accurately reflected the data, were coherent internally, and distinct from one another. Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its core meaning and relevance to the study's objectives.

Finally, in the sixth phase, rich and compelling extracts were selected as evidence to illustrate each theme and sub-theme. These extracts were directly tied to the research questions and objectives, ensuring that the final themes authentically represented participants' perspectives on communication patterns and marital stability among long-term couples. The analysis culminated in a comprehensive report presenting these themes and sub-themes as the findings of the study.

### **3.10 Data Saturation**

Data saturation was achieved when the researcher continued to gather data from the sample until no new information, themes, or insight emerged. In other words, after a certain point in the data collection process, additional interviews did not contribute novel or different information relevant to the research questions. During coding and analysis, no new codes or categories were identified, indicating that the data had been fully explored. Saturation was actually reached before all the 25 interviews were conducted.

### **3.11 Trustworthiness and Authenticity of the Data**

The concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research is the extent to which the findings are a true reflection or accuracy of the participants' personal or lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is established when findings of the study reflect, as closely as

possible, the meanings as described by the research participants. Others defined the term as a measure of determining whether the research findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of the report (Creswell, 2016; Polit & Beck, 2017).

Trustworthiness is an important consideration in evaluating the findings of qualitative research. It is an indicator of the extent to which the study was conducted meticulously, and hence, the value of a qualitative research is strengthened by its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lietz, Langer and Furman (2006) declared that trustworthiness involves engaging in efforts that increase the confidence that the findings of the study represent the meanings presented by the participants. This explored communication patterns on marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality. To determine the trustworthiness of the findings of the study, the researcher adopted the four evaluation criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) namely; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as decried below.

### **3.11.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations of such data (Polit & Beck, 2017). It is about establishing whether or not the research findings represent acceptable information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As was pointed out by Lincoln and Guba, credibility involves 1) carrying out the study in a way that enhances the believability of the findings, and 2) taking steps to demonstrate credibility in the research reports.

In addressing the issue of credibility, Terrablanche and Durheim (2012) indicated that researchers attempt to establish that a true picture of the phenomenon understudy is

being presented. Strategies used to establish credibility include prolonged engagement with study participants, persistent observation (if appropriate to the study), peer debriefing, member-checking, triangulation and reflective journaling (Connelly, 2016, Creswell, 2016). In this study, the strategies adopted by the researcher to ensure credibility of the findings include prolonged engagement in the research setting, peer debriefing and member-checking.

The researcher invested a lot of time in the data gathering process in order to have an in-depth understanding of the communication patterns on marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality. Arrangements were made with the participants so that the researcher could return to them for follow up interviews to seek confirmation or clarification of issues discussed during previous interview sessions. In accordance with this prior arrangement, a second interview was conducted with five of the participants. This was after the first interviews were transcribed and it was realized that certain gaps and misunderstandings emerged that needed to be clarified. The second interview sessions helped clear all doubts and inconsistencies in the participants' narrations and thus confirmed the information provided as credible.

The researcher, prior to conducting the interviews, visited the research setting more than once, and engaged the participants in conversation and discussions about the study. Similar engagements were made on phone to discuss the dates for the interview. These engagements with the participants helped in the building of trust and establishment of rapport between the researcher and the participants. It was intended to make it more likely for rich and detailed information to be obtained as it helped minimize distortions of information that might arise if there were no familiarity between the researcher and participants. As was stressed by Bhattacharjee (2018),

prolonged engagement in the fieldwork helps the researcher to understand the core issues that might affect the quality of the data because it helps to develop trust with the study participants.

Peer debriefing is the process that involves a researcher locating a person, referred to as a peer debriefer, who critiques and asks questions about the study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2016). This probing includes, but not limited to, methodology, interpretation, and analysis of data. The process involves a researcher exposing himself/herself to searching questions from other people (Creswell, 2016). The purpose of per debriefing is to ensure that aspects of the research that might otherwise remain only hidden in the researcher's mind are explored by neutral persons (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Bhattacharjee (2018) stressed that peer debriefings are vital because feedback from peers help the researcher to improve the quality of the study findings. In this study therefore, the researcher discussed the topic and his ideas behind choosing the topic with his supervisor who provided useful guidance on the project. He also engaged his colleague students and other researchers and sought their views about the suitability and feasibility of the topic.

Member checking involves taking the report or parts of it or specific descriptions or themes back to participants for them to confirm whether it is an accurate representation of their experiences (Creswell, 2016; Polit & Beck, 2017). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that member checking is a vital procedure that any qualitative researcher must undergo because it is the heart of credibility of the qualitative research findings.

Member checking involves researchers asking participants to elaborate on, or clarify what they have said in interviews or done in observed scenes or when researchers sum up what they have heard at the end of an interview or seen following an observation session, and then ask participants to comment on the accuracy of these summaries (Creswell, 2016). In this study, member checking was carried out during the data collection process by asking probing questions, and conducting follow-up interviews with some of the participants to help clear doubts about the information they provided. During and after data analysis, the researcher discussed the major findings and themes with some of the participants to seek their views on the authenticity of the report. This gave participants the opportunity to review the report and make comments on the themes and findings.

### **3.11.1 Transferability**

The concept of transferability refers to the degree to which findings of the research can be transferred to or applied to other settings or contexts with other participants (Polit & Beck, 2017; Bhattacharjee, 2018). Bassey (cited in Bhattacharjee, 2018) suggested that transferability could only be achieved if people in other settings or contexts believe their situations to be similar to those described in a particular study, and hence may relate the findings to their own positions. The strategies researchers can use to ensure transferability of qualitative research include providing thick descriptions of the research process, and the use of purposive sampling techniques (Bhattacharjee, 2018). In this study, the strategies of 'thick descriptions', and use of purposive sampling techniques were applied to ensure transferability.

The phrase "thick description" originally meant an "insider's account" (Marshall & Rossman, 2013), but has come to be used to refer to "a highly descriptive, detailed

presentation of a study setting and in particular, the findings of a study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When thick description is used as a strategy to ensure transferability, it refers to a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Polit and Beck (2017) described thick description as a rich, thorough, and vivid description of the research context, the study participants, and the experiences and processes observed during the inquiry. Various authors have alluded to the fact that the researcher has a vital role to play in using thick description as a strategy to ensure transferability. For example Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide adequate descriptive data about the study to enable readers to evaluate the applicability of the data to other contexts Polit and Beck (2017) stated that researchers need to provide a rich picture of the research process that will inform and resonate with readers. Similarly, Terrablanche and Durheim (2012) also stated that to allow for transferability, the researcher must provide sufficient detail of the context of the fieldwork for the readers to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation, and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting.

In this study, a detailed description of the setting and the entire process of the study: that is rich and extensive details about the methodology from the setting, data collection procedure, data analysis to the production of the final study report were done in order to enhance transferability. Direct quotes from participants were used to support emerging themes. Providing a thick description that provides detailed information about the research process helps other researchers to replicate the study with similar conditions in other settings (Terrablanche & Durheim, 2012) as it

enables judgments to be made about how well the context of the study fits other contexts (Guba, 1981; Polit & Beck, 2017).

### **3.11.2 Dependability**

Dependability of qualitative research findings corresponds to reliability of findings in quantitative research (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The researcher ensured the dependability of his conclusions of the study by asking clear questions during data collection. Participant validation was also used to validate the interview guide. The researcher did this by giving participants the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews. Participants were then asked to provide feedback on whether the information accurately reflected what they said or meant, or whether any key details left out. Participants agreed to the transcript of the interview and the interpretation thereof, indicating the accuracy of data collected.

### **3.11.3 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the researcher's imagination but clearly derived from the data (Creswell, 2016). The researcher achieved this by using an audit trail, which provided a means of ensuring that constructions can be seen to have emerged directly from the data, thereby confirming the research findings and grounding them in the evidence or raw data. The researcher recorded the data as accurately as possible and as well undertook member checking and with participant validation with participants to ascertain that data recorded reasonably represented their accounts. The use of audio recorder enabled the

researcher to revisit events and conversations especially where the researcher was in doubt.

### **3.12 Ethical Considerations**

In line with established research ethics, the researcher initially provided participants with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose and sought their consent to confirm their willingness to take part in the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, participants' names were not recorded, and all contributions were treated anonymously. Privacy was strictly maintained during data collection, with no unauthorized persons allowed access to the information. Participants were informed that all data would be handled confidentially, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. They were also reassured that the research was purely for academic purposes.

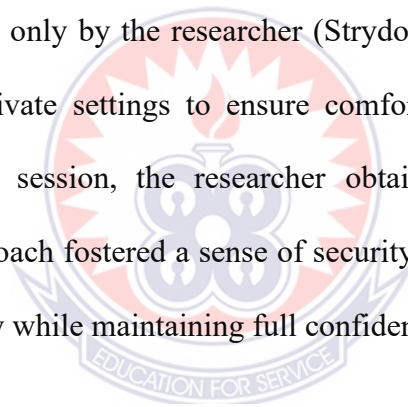
Participants were given comprehensive information about the aims and procedures of the study, enabling them to make an informed decision regarding their participation (Strydom & Venter, 2002; Punch, 2009). Obtaining informed consent is a fundamental ethical requirement in research involving human subjects. In this study, the researcher clearly communicated the purpose, scope, and significance of the research to participants and emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary. No participant was coerced into joining the study.

Ethical research principles emphasize voluntary participation and the avoidance of harm (Babbie, 2004). Participants must have a full understanding of any potential risks, whether physical or emotional, associated with the study (Strydom & Venter, 2002). Throughout this research, the investigator took care to prevent any physical, psychological, or emotional harm. Interviews were conducted respectfully and

politely, without any abusive or offensive language, and participants were made to feel comfortable and welcomed.

Protecting the identities of research participants is essential to safeguard their well-being and interests (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). In this study, participants' identities were kept anonymous. Responses could not be traced back to individual participants, as unique numerical codes were used instead of names. Both the audio recordings and written reports excluded any identifying information, ensuring that participants remained unidentifiable.

Confidentiality requires that all information shared by participants is securely managed and accessed only by the researcher (Strydom & Venter, 2002). Interviews were conducted in private settings to ensure comfort and minimize interruptions. Before recording any session, the researcher obtained explicit permission from participants. This approach fostered a sense of security, allowing participants to share their experiences freely while maintaining full confidentiality of their responses.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents data and discussion of results. The presentation is in two sections; Section A and B. Section A presents the results on demographic information of participants, whereas Section B deals with the analysis of the qualitative data.

#### 4.1 Section A: Bio-Data of Participants

The demographic analysis shows that, out of the 25 couples sampled for the study, 10(40%) were males and 15(60%) were females. This means majority of participants were females, indicating unequal gender distribution of participants. On the age of participants, 5(20%) were within the ages 30-40 years, 15(60%) within 41-50 years, and 5(20%) within 51-60 years. The majority of participants were within the age group 41-50 years. On the number of years for which participants had been married, 4(16%) mentioned 10-15 years, 3(12%) mentioned 16-20 years, 10(40%) mentioned 21-25 years and 8(32%) mentioned 26-30 years. Inferring from the data, the majority of participants had married for 21-25 years. On the occupation of profession of participants, 5(20%) were drivers, 7(28%) were farmers, 3(12%) were petty traders, 6(28%) were teachers and 4(16%) were fishmongers. The analysis of data revealed that the majority of participants were teachers.

The demographic characteristics of the participants provide important context for interpreting the study's findings. The higher proportion of females suggests that women may be more willing to share their perspectives on communication and marital stability, potentially influencing the themes that emerged. The dominance of participants in the 41-50 age range, combined with the fact that most had been

married for over 20 years, implies that the study primarily captured the experiences of mature couples with long-term marital histories. This offers valuable insights into communication patterns that sustain marriages over time but may limit the generalizability of the findings to newly married couples or younger age groups. Finally, the occupational background, with a concentration of teachers and farmers, reflects a socio-economic context in which educational attainment and livelihood stability might shape couples' communication practices. These demographic patterns therefore help situate the study's findings within a specific social, cultural, and economic framework.

#### **4.2 Section B: Analysis of Qualitative Data**

This section of the study presents and analyses data elicited from participants during interview sessions on various issues related to marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality. The data presented is encapsulated views of the participants and these are presented in verbatim statements of the participants to align with the research objectives and the questions.

#### **Research Question 1: What communication patterns are exhibited by couples in stable marriages in the Bibiani Municipality?**

The above research question sought to find out the communication patterns marriage couples exhibited. In response to the above research question, participants had the following to say:

Theme: Empathy

A male teacher intimated that:

In our marriage, we make an effort to truly listen to each other's feeling before offering advice.

A female farmer also stated that:

We always try to put ourselves in each other's shoes, especially during tough times, to better understand what the other is going through.

A Female petty trader disclosed that:

When tensions rise, we pause and ask how the other person feels, rather than just focusing on our own perspectives.

A Male driver stated that:

I make sure to acknowledge my partner's emotions even when I don't fully agree with their point of view.

A Female teacher disclosed that:

Our communication is built on understanding one another's needs and emotions, not just exchanging words.

A Female fishmonger said that:

We prioritize validating each other's feelings, knowing that empathy helps us to stay emotionally connected.

A male farmer stated that:

Whenever one of us is upset, the other offers a listening ear and emotional support, rather than trying to 'fix' things right away.

Couples in stable marriages emphasize empathy by actively listening, validating each other's emotions, and making an effort to understanding their partner's perspective. They prioritize emotional connection, offering support and recognizing that each person experiences situations differently. Instead of focusing solely on solutions, they respect and acknowledge each other's feelings, which strengthen their marriage and bring out mutual understanding.

### **Theme: Expression of Love**

A female farmer disclosed that:

In our marriage, saying 'I love you' frequently, both in person and over text, reinforces our bond.

Similarly, a male driver intimated that:

Physical affection like holding hands or cuddling is our way of silently communicating love and closeness.

A female teacher indicated that:

We express love by supporting each other's goals and celebrating achievements, big or small.

Also, a male teacher intimated that:

Our way of expressing love includes words of affirmation, constantly reminding each other how much we appreciate and cherish our relationship.

A female trader stated that:

We express love through kindness and patience, even during moments of frustration or disagreement.

Male fishmonger disclosed that:

Surprising each other with thoughtful gifts or small tokens of appreciation is a regular part of how we communicate our love.

A female teacher recounted:

We make an effort to the present for each other, putting away distractions to truly connect and show love during conversations.

In stable marriages, couples express love through small, consistent gestures like affectionate words, physical touch, and acts of service. They prioritize spending quality time together, support each other's goals, and communicate love through patience, kindness and appreciation. By being present, offering words of affirmation

and occasionally surprising each other with thoughtful actions or gifts, they strengthen their emotional connections.

**Theme: Honesty**

A female teacher stated that:

We have learnt that addressing issues as they arise with honesty is better than letting them fester and cause bigger problems later.

According to a male farmer:

Being truth even in difficult conversations ensures that we are both clear about our expectations and stay aligned as a couple.

Similarly, a female trader stated that:

We maintain honesty by openly sharing our thoughts and concerns, knowing that hiding things would only create friction between us.

A male fishmonger recounted:

We never shy away from being honest about our mistakes, which allows us to grow individually and as a couple without holding grudges.

For male teacher:

Honesty is key in our communication, as it helps us understand each other's true emotions and prevents resentment from building up.

A female trader stated:

In our marriage, we found that being completely honest, even when it's hard, leads to more meaningful conversations and a stronger partnership.

A male trader said:

We believe that honesty goes hand-in-hand with vulnerability and by being honest, we create a safe space where both of us can express ourselves fully.

In stable marriages, couples prioritize honesty by openly sharing their feelings, thoughts and concerns, even when it is difficult. They address issues promptly, express their needs, which engender trust and prevents resentment. This transparency creates a safe space for vulnerability, allowing both partners to communicate more deeply and strengthen their bond

With recourse to the responses per communication patterns exhibited by couples in stable marriages, themes bothering on empathy, express of love and honesty came up. However, expression of love and honesty emerged as the main communication patterns that couples in stable marriage exhibited. The findings corroborate Essuman's (2010) postulation that couples in successful marriages engage in regular expression of affection, such as verbal affirmation, physical touch, and spending quality time together.

### **Research Question 2: How Ineffective Communication Patterns Manifest among Couples Experiencing Marital Stability?**

The above research question sought to find out ways in which ineffective communication patterns manifest among couples experiencing marital stability. Below are what participants had to say in response to research question two.

Theme: Emotional Disconnect and Avoidance

Couples may struggle with avoiding deep, emotional conversation, leading to emotional distance. This often manifests as one or both partners withholding their feelings or avoiding vulnerable discussions, causing a breakdown in emotional intimacy

In response to the questions of ways ineffective communication patterns manifest among couples experiencing marital stability, the following were what some participants had to say.

A female teacher disclosed that:

We've grown so distant that we no longer talk about how we feel, avoiding emotional conversations altogether.

A female trader indicated that:

Whenever we have a disagreement, instead of addressing it, we both shut down and pretend everything is fine.

A female fishmonger intimated that:

I often feel like we're just going through the motions, avoiding any deep connection or meaningful dialogue.

The responses highlight how emotional disconnect and avoidance manifest in marriages as ineffective communication. Couples avoid discussing deep emotions or problems, creating distance and leaving issues unresolved. They may distract themselves with external activities, shut down during conflicts, or avoid meaningful conversations altogether. This avoidance leads to emotional isolation, where partners feel unheard, disconnected, and like they are living emotionally separate lives.

### **Theme: Passive-Aggressiveness**

The following responses indicate how passive aggressiveness manifests as an ineffective communication pattern among couples experiencing marital instability:

A male driver stated that:

Whenever I ask my partner to do something, they agree but intentionally take forever to get it done, knowing it frustrates me.

A male trader said that:

Instead of directly expressing their frustration, my partner uses sarcastic comments that leave me feeling hurt and confused.

A female trader intimated that:

When we have disagreements, my partner doesn't talk to me but gives me the cold shoulder for days, leaving issues unresolved.

A male fishmonger stated that:

Rather than address our problems, my partner makes subtle, snide remarks, which build resentment without ever leading to a real conversation.

A female fishmonger disclosed that:

Whenever I bring up something that bothers me, my partner dismisses it with humor, making it difficult to have a serious discussion.

The responses above show how passive-aggressiveness manifests in marital instability through indirect and subtle behaviors. Instead of addressing issues openly, partners use sarcasm, humor, or silent treatment to express frustration. They may delay tasks, make snide remarks, or act indifferent, creating tension without directly confronting the problem. This pattern leads to unresolved conflicts, hidden resentment, and emotional disconnect, as partners avoid honest communication and leave each other feeling confused and hurt.

### **Theme: Frequent Misunderstandings**

The following responses reflect how frequent misunderstandings manifest as ineffective communication patterns among couples experiencing marital instability:

A male driver stated that:

We often argue over simple things because we constantly misunderstand each other's intentions.

A male fishmonger said that:

Whenever we try to discuss important matters, one of us always misinterprets the other's words, which leads to unnecessary conflict.

A female teacher intimated that:

It feels like no matter how clear I try to be, my partner always takes my words the wrong way, which frustrates both of us.

A female farmer disclosed that:

We spend more time clarifying what we meant than actually solving the issue at hand, causing our conversations to go in circles.

A female fishmonger stated that:

I'll say something with good intentions, but my partner hears it as criticism, and we end up arguing over things I never meant to say.

The above responses highlight how frequent misunderstandings manifest as ineffective communication in unstable marriages. Couples often misinterpret each other's words, tone, or intentions, leading to unnecessary conflicts and arguments. They struggle to understand each other clearly, causing frustration, circular conversations, and unresolved issues. These misunderstandings, even over minor topics, escalate tensions and prevent effective problem-solving, contributing to ongoing miscommunication and emotional disconnect.

### **Theme: Inconsistent or Mixed Signals**

This theme illustrates how inconsistent or mixed signals manifest as ineffective communication patterns among couples experiencing marital instability:

A male trader indicated that:

One day, my partner is affectionate, and the next, she is distant, leaving me confused about where we stand emotionally.

A female teacher had this to say:

I feel like I'm constantly guessing what my partner wants because their behavior changes without any explanation.

A male fishmonger indicated that:

Sometimes he acts like everything's fine, but then he suddenly gets upset over something I thought wasn't an issue."

The above responses reveal how inconsistent or mixed signals manifest as ineffective communication in unstable marriages. Partners display fluctuating behaviours, being affectionate one moment and distant the next, or saying one thing but acting in ways that contradict their words. This inconsistency creates confusion, as one partner is left uncertain about the other's true feelings, desires, or intentions. These mixed messages lead to frustration, emotional disconnect, and unresolved issues, as partners struggle to understand and navigate each other's behaviour.

### **Theme: Dominance/Interruptions**

The theme illustrates how dominance/ interruptions manifest as ineffective communication patterns among couples experiencing marital instability:

A male teacher had this to say:

Whenever we have a disagreement, my partner constantly interrupts me before I can finish, making it impossible for me to fully express my thoughts or feelings.

A female trader indicated that:

Our conversations often feel one-sided because my partner dominates the discussion, leaving no room for my opinions or input.

A male trader indicated that:

I feel like I'm always being talked over during arguments, as if my voice doesn't matter, which leaves me feeling silenced and frustrated.

A male fishmonger had this to say:

Whenever I try to share my perspective, my partner cuts me off and takes over the conversation, making it hard for us to reach any mutual understanding.

A female teacher stated that:

It's difficult to communicate because my partner constantly interrupts, assuming they know what I'm going to say without actually listening.

The above responses illustrate how dominance and interruptions create ineffective communication patterns in unstable marriages. Partners who dominate conversations and frequently interrupt prevent their spouse from fully expressing themselves, leading to feelings of frustration and being unheard. This one-sided communication approach undermines mutual understanding, as one partner's voice and opinions are overshadowed, causing unresolved conflicts and emotional disconnect.

With recourse to the responses relative to the question of ways ineffective communication patterns manifest among couples experiencing marital stability,

factors such as emotional disconnect, passive aggressiveness, frequent misunderstandings, inconsistent or mixed signals and dominance or interruptions came up. However, it was the view of the majority of participants that, ineffective communication patterns manifested among couples experiencing marital stability as passive aggressiveness, frequent misunderstandings and dominance or interruptions. The foregoing is consistent with Noller's (2019) assertion that, passive aggressive behaviour can contribute to long-term dissatisfaction in marriages because it creates an undercurrent resentment and unspoken conflict.

**Research Question 3: What role do active listening in fostering positive communication among couples?**

The research question above sought to find out the role active listening plays in fostering positive communication among couples.

**Theme: Enhanced Empathy/Understanding**

Active listening helps partners truly understand each other's perspectives and feelings, fostering greater empathy. By fully engaging in each other's experiences, couples can better support and relate to one another, strengthening their emotional connection.

In respect of enhanced empathy or understanding, below are some comments participants made.

A Male teacher indicated that:

Active listening allows us to share our deepest feelings without fear of judgment. When I know my partner is truly hearing me, it deepens our emotional connection and makes me feel valued and understood.

A male driver had this to say:

By fully engaging in each other's stories and emotions, active listening helps us relate to each other's experiences on a deeper level, enhancing our emotional intimacy and reinforcing our bond.

Participant 4 hinted that:

When we actively listen, we're more in tune with each other's emotional states, which helps us provide better support and comfort, leading to a stronger and more intimate relationship.

participant 6 disclosed that:

Active listening fosters an environment where we both feel safe to express our vulnerabilities. This openness and mutual understanding help us connect more deeply and strengthen our emotional closeness.

Participant 8 intimated that:

Through active listening, we're able to respond empathetically and thoughtfully to each other's concerns, which helps us build trust and intimacy as we feel more secure in sharing our innermost thoughts.

Participant 9 stated that:

Engaging in active listening allows us to validate each other's emotions genuinely. This validation reinforces our emotional connection and makes us feel more connected and understood in the relationship.

Participant 11 had this to say:

Active listening helps us tune into the subtle emotional cues and needs of each other, which leads to a more profound emotional connection and a greater sense of intimacy in our daily interactions.

Participant 12 hinted that:

When we practice active listening, it shows that we value each other's feelings and perspectives, which

fosters a deeper emotional bond and enhances our overall intimacy as a couple.

The above responses highlight how active listening enhances emotional intimacy in couples. By truly engaging in each other's feelings and perspectives, partners feel valued, understood, and secure in sharing their vulnerabilities. This practice deepens their emotional connection, fosters mutual empathy, and strengthens their bond. Active listening creates a supportive environment that reinforces trust and closeness, leading to a more profound and intimate relationship.

### **Theme: Increased Mutual Respect**

The theme illustrates how increased mutual respect results from active listening in couples' communication. The following are some responses participants shared in respect of the above theme.

A female fishmonger indicated that:

When we actively listen to each other, it shows that we value each other's opinions and feelings. This respect reinforces our partnership, making us more considerate and understanding towards one another.

For a male teacher:

Active listening demonstrates that we are genuinely interested in what the other person has to say, which fosters a deeper respect for each other's perspectives and strengthens our mutual appreciation.

Similarly, a female teacher disclosed that:

By attentively listening to my partner, I show that his thoughts and feelings are important to me. This mutual respect creates a more balanced and respectful dynamic in our relationship.

A male trader indicated that:

Active listening helps us avoid interrupting or dismissing each other's points of view, which is a sign of respect. This practice encourages open and respectful dialogue, enhancing our overall communication.

A male driver had this to say:

When we listen actively, it prevents us from jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about each other's intentions. This careful consideration fosters greater respect and trust in our relationship.

For a female trader:

Active listening allows us to acknowledge and validate each other's experiences and emotions. This validation demonstrates mutual respect and helps us feel more valued and understood in our relationship.

A male farmer hinted that:

By focusing fully on each other during conversations, we avoid distractions and show that we respect and prioritize our input, which enhances the mutual respect between us.

In similar vein, a male farmer disclosed that:

Active listening encourages us to consider and appreciate our partner's viewpoint, even if it differs from our own. This respect for differing opinions strengthens our relationship and promotes healthier communication.

A female trader indicated that:

Engaging in active listening means we are willing to put aside our own agenda to fully understand our needs and feelings. This respect for perspective builds a stronger and more respectful connection.

The above responses emphasize that active listening fosters increased mutual respect in couples. By attentively engaging with each other's thoughts and feelings, partners demonstrate that they value each other's perspectives, avoid interruptions or assumptions, and validate each other's experiences. This respectful approach promotes open, considerate dialogue, strengthens trust, and enhances the overall communication dynamic in the relationship.

### **Theme: Strengthened Bonds and Validation**

This theme illustrates how strengthened bonds and validation result from active listening in couples' communication. In respect of this, participants made the following statements:

A male farmer indicated that:

Active listening helps us validate each other's feelings by demonstrating that we truly hear and understand what the other person is expressing. This validation strengthens our emotional bond and fosters a deeper connection.

A female trader stated that:

When we practice active listening, we acknowledge and affirm each other's experiences and emotions, which enhances our sense of mutual respect and deepens our bond as a couple.

For a male trader:

Through active listening, we are able to provide meaningful feedback and reassurance, which validates our emotions and strengthens the connection between us by showing that our feelings matter.

A female fishmonger stated that:

When we listen attentively and validate each other's perspectives, it creates a sense of being truly understood and valued, which enhances our emotional bond and fortifies our relationship.

A male teacher intimated that:

Active listening allows us to validate each other's viewpoints and emotional responses, reinforcing our commitment to understanding and supporting each other, which solidifies our relationship.

The responses above highlight how active listening fosters strengthened bonds and validation in couples. By attentively listening and affirming each other's emotions and perspectives, partners show that they genuinely understand and value each other's feelings. This validation builds trust, enhances emotional intimacy, and reinforces the connection between them, resulting in a more resilient and supportive marriage.

Considering the responses relative to the question of the role active listening plays in fostering positive communication among couples, it emerged that increased mutual respect, strengthened bond through validation and empathy and understanding are some roles active listening plays. However, increased mutual respect and empathy and understanding were the position of the majority of participants. The findings are in tandem with Gordon's (2010) assertion that, active listening involves tuning into the emotional content of a conversation and responding in a way that shows understanding and concern for the other partner's feelings. Gordon further stated that this process engenders empathy as partners are better able to put themselves in each other's shoes, enhancing emotional intimacy.

**Research Question 4: How do couples resolve conflict through communication to foster marital stability**

This research question sought to find out how couples resolve conflict through communication to foster marriage stability.

**Theme: Open and Honest Dialogue**

The theme illustrates how open and honest dialogue helps couples resolve conflicts and foster marriage stability:

A female farmer indicated that:

We make it a point to address issues directly and honestly, which allows us to understand each other's concerns clearly and work towards effective solutions without hidden agendas.

A male fishmonger hinted that:

When conflicts arise, we sit down and openly discuss our feelings and perspectives, ensuring that nothing is left unsaid. This transparency helps us resolve issues and strengthen our relationship.

A male teacher disclosed that:

We prioritize having honest conversations about our disagreements, which prevents misunderstandings and builds trust. This approach helps us address problems head-on and find mutually agreeable solutions.

A male driver stated that:

By openly expressing our concerns and emotions during conflicts, we avoid bottling up feelings. This honesty helps us address issues more effectively and maintain a stable and supportive marriage.

A female teacher stated that:

During conflicts, we ensure that our communication is straightforward and honest. This clear approach helps us avoid assumptions and misunderstandings, leading to more effective problem-solving.

The statements emphasize that open and honest dialogue is crucial for resolving conflicts and fostering stability in marriage. Couples benefit from directly and transparently addressing their issues, which helps prevent misunderstandings and build trust. By openly expressing their feelings and concerns, partners can collaboratively tackle problems, find mutually agreeable solutions, and strengthen their relationship. This clear and candid communication approach ensures effective problem-solving and maintains a supportive and stable marriage.

**Theme: Active Listening/Empathy**

The theme illustrates how active listening/empathy is used to resolve conflicts and foster marital stability.

A male driver indicated that:

When we have a disagreement, we dedicate time to actively listen to each other's viewpoints without interrupting. This ensures that each partner feels truly heard and understood, which helps us address the issue with greater empathy and find a resolution that strengthens our relationship.

A female farmer hinted that:

During conflicts, we make a conscious effort to reflect back what the partner is saying to show that we are listening and understanding their perspective. This empathetic approach helps us uncover underlying issues and work together to resolve them effectively.

A female teacher mentioned that:

To resolve conflicts, we set aside quiet time where we focus solely on each other's concerns. Through active listening and empathetic responses, we can navigate our disagreements with a clear understanding of each other's feelings and reach a mutually agreeable solution.

The above responses highlight how active listening and empathy are crucial in resolving conflicts and fostering marital stability. Couples use these techniques by dedicating specific times to focus on each other's perspectives, reflecting back what is heard, asking clarifying questions, and expressing feelings with empathy. This approach ensures that each partner feels truly understood, addresses emotional aspects of disagreements, and leads to more constructive and compassionate solutions, thereby strengthening their relationship.

**Theme: Collaborative Problem-Solving**

The theme illustrates how collaborative problem-solving helps couples resolve conflicts and foster marriage stability. In respect of the foregoing, participants indicated the following:

A female fishmonger said that:

When we face a disagreement, we sit down together to brainstorm potential solutions. By working collaboratively, we can find a compromise that satisfies both of our needs and strengthens our relationship.

A male fishmonger indicated that:

We approach conflicts with the mindset of a team. Instead of focusing on who is right, we discuss the issue together, evaluate possible solutions, and agree on a plan that works for both of us.

A male trader intimated that:

Instead of arguing over who is at fault, we focus on understanding the problem and working together to find a solution. This collaborative problem-solving method helps us manage conflicts constructively and build a stronger relationship.

A female farmer stated that:

When resolving conflicts, we both take an active role in suggesting and evaluating solutions. By combining our ideas and perspectives, we arrive at agreements that reflect both of our needs and enhance our marital stability.

The above responses emphasize that collaborative problem-solving is key to resolving conflicts and fostering marital stability. Couples work together by brainstorming, evaluating solutions, and agreeing on a plan that addresses both partners' needs. This approach involves openly discussing concerns, actively participating in finding solutions, and maintaining a team mindset, which helps manage conflicts constructively and strengthen their relationship.

### **Theme: Respectful and Non-Confrontational Communication**

The theme illustrates how respectful and non-confrontational communication helps couples resolve conflicts and foster marriage stability.

A male farmer indicated that:

When we have a disagreement, we make a conscious effort to use calm and respectful language. By avoiding accusatory or confrontational tones, we ensure that our discussions remain productive and focused on finding a resolution.

A male driver stated that:

During conflicts, we choose our words carefully and express our concerns without blaming or criticizing each other. This respectful approach helps us address issues

constructively and prevents escalation, contributing to a stable marriage.

A female teacher intimated that:

We practice non-confrontational communication by framing our concerns as personal feelings rather than personal attacks. For example, instead of saying 'You never listen to me,' we say 'I feel unheard when we talk.' This method fosters a more respectful dialogue.

A male teacher hinted that:

In our conflict resolution process, we prioritize maintaining a respectful tone and avoiding interruptions. By allowing each partner to speak without being confrontational, we ensure peace in our marriage.

A male driver disclosed that:

We use 'I' statements to express our feelings during conflicts, such as 'I feel upset when...!' This technique helps us communicate our concerns without placing blame, which supports a respectful and nonconfrontational approach to problem-solving.

The above responses emphasize that respectful and non-confrontational communication is essential for resolving conflicts and fostering marital stability. Couples use calm language, 'I' statements, and active listening to express their concerns without blame or criticism. They maintain a respectful tone, avoid interruptions, and take breaks if needed to manage emotions. This approach helps prevent escalation, promotes understanding, and supports constructive problemsolving, contributing to a more stable and supportive relationship.

### **Theme: Setting and Respecting Boundaries**

The theme illustrates how setting and respecting boundaries helps couples resolve conflicts and foster marriage stability. On that note, participants had the following to say:

A male teacher stated that:

When a disagreement arises, we establish clear boundaries by agreeing to discuss the issue at a specific time rather than during a heated moment. This approach helps us manage emotions and resolve conflicts more calmly and respectfully.

A female fishmonger disclosed that:

We respect each other's need for personal space during conflicts by agreeing to take breaks if needed. This ensures that we can approach the discussion with a clearer mind and avoid escalating the situation.

A male trader mentioned that:

To prevent conflicts from becoming overwhelming, we set boundaries on how long we will discuss an issue at one time, such as 30 minutes. This helps us stay focused and prevents the conversation from turning into a prolonged argument.

A female trader indicated that:

We establish ground rules for conflict discussions, such as no interrupting and no name-calling. By adhering to these boundaries, we maintain a respectful tone and address issues constructively, which strengthens our marriage.

A female teacher stated that:

During conflicts, we agree to avoid discussing sensitive topics late at night or when we are both tired. Setting this boundary helps us approach the conversation with a better attitude and fosters more effective problem-solving.

The above responses emphasize that setting and respecting boundaries is crucial for resolving conflicts and fostering marital stability. Couples establish clear guidelines such as setting specific times for discussions, taking breaks, avoiding sensitive topics during high-stress times, and adhering to respectful language. By respecting each other's need for personal space and focused communication, and agreeing on ground rules, they manage emotions effectively, prevent escalation, and maintain constructive dialogues. This approach helps them address issues calmly and strengthen their relationship.

Gleaning from the various responses regarding how couples resolve conflicts through communication to ensure marriages stability, participants indicated open and honest dialogue, active listening and empathy, collaborative problem-solving, respectful and non-confrontational communication and setting and respecting boundaries. However, it emerged from the study that, the majority of participants resolved conflict through open and honest dialogue, respectful and non-confrontational communication and setting and respecting boundaries. These findings are consistent with the views of Halliday (2018) to the effect that, couples who engage in direct and transparent communication during disagreements are more likely to resolve conflicts effectively and maintain long-term marital satisfaction. Buttressing the foregoing, Bloom (2019) opined that, couples who openly express their thoughts, feelings and concerns build mutual understanding and trust, which are essential for conflict resolution. Noller (2019) was of the view that, passive aggressive behaviour can contribute to long-term dissatisfaction in marriages because it creates an undercurrent resentment and unspoken conflict.

### **4.3 Discussion of Findings**

This section discusses the major findings of the study in relation to the research objectives, linking them to existing literature and the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI). The discussion highlights both consistencies and divergences between the current results and previous studies while situating the findings within the broader context of marital communication. In doing so, the analysis not only underscores how communication patterns influence marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality but also reflects on the theoretical implications of identity negotiation, relational dynamics, and conflict management in marriage.

#### **4.3.1 Communication patterns couples exhibit in stable marriages**

The study revealed that expression of love and honesty were the dominant communication patterns among couples in stable marriages in Bibiani Municipality. Couples demonstrated affection through everyday gestures such as leaving thoughtful notes, unexpected hugs, supporting each other's goals, and celebrating achievements. Such practices reinforced intimacy, strengthened bonds, and provided a sense of security in the relationship. Conversely, ineffective patterns were also observed, including passive aggressiveness, frequent misunderstandings, and conversational dominance or interruptions. For instance, couples often resorted to sarcasm, humor, or silent treatment to express dissatisfaction rather than openly addressing the issue. Misinterpretations of tone or intentions frequently caused unnecessary conflicts, while dominance in conversations often silenced one partner, leading to feelings of neglect and frustration.

These findings align with Mensah & Adjei (2022), who found that Ghanaian couples in long-term marriages often rely on open emotional expressions such as verbal

affirmation and affectionate gestures as vital strategies for maintaining stability. Similarly, Adegbite et al. (2021) observed in Nigeria that couples who actively communicate love and appreciation demonstrate higher marital satisfaction. However, the negative patterns identified in this study mirror the conclusions of Kifle & Woldeamanuel (2023), who emphasized that unresolved sarcasm and dominance often erode trust and create cycles of conflict in marriages.

From the lens of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the relational frame is strongly illustrated here. Expression of love and honesty reinforces a shared couple identity, while negative patterns such as dominance undermine it by silencing one partner's identity in the interaction. Thus, how couples negotiate communication reflects how they co-construct their marital identity, which in turn shapes the stability of the marriage.

#### **4.3.2 Role of active listening in fostering positive communication among couples**

The study highlighted that active listening fosters mutual respect, empathy, and understanding in marital relationships. Couples who attentively engaged with each other's thoughts and feelings validated their partner's experiences, which strengthened their bond. Empathy emerged as a central outcome of active listening, as partners felt heard, valued, and secure to share their vulnerabilities. This deeper emotional connection enhanced marital satisfaction and trust.

This finding is consistent with Boateng & Teye (2021), who reported that active listening promotes constructive dialogue and prevents escalation of conflicts among married couples in Ghana. Crespo et al. (2020) also found that active listening strengthens marital resilience by enhancing emotional attunement and reducing miscommunication. On the other hand, Amissah (2023) cautioned that the absence of

active listening often creates relational distance, especially where couples prioritize winning arguments over understanding perspectives.

According to CTI, this finding demonstrates the communal frame, where identity is co-constructed within the marital unit. Active listening enables both partners to feel included and validated, reinforcing the couple's shared identity. When partners fail to listen, however, fractures in identity alignment emerge, creating relational instability.

#### **4.3.3 Strategies couples adopt to resolve conflicts in marriage**

The study found that the majority of couples resolved conflicts through open and honest dialogue, respectful and non-confrontational communication, and the setting and respecting of boundaries. By directly addressing issues in a transparent manner, couples avoided the pitfalls of miscommunication, strengthened trust, and reinforced their commitment to the relationship. Respectful communication allowed them to express concerns without criticism, while active listening played a mediating role in understanding perspectives. Additionally, the establishment of clear boundaries helped regulate emotions and ensured that conflicts were managed constructively.

This resonates with Adu-Gyamfi (2021), who argued that respectful dialogue remains one of the most effective strategies for conflict resolution in Ghanaian households. Similarly, Okafor & Udeh (2022) found that couples who establish and maintain boundaries in communication experience higher marital stability compared to those who rely on confrontational or avoidance strategies. By contrast, Nyarko & Osei (2024) reported that avoidance of direct confrontation, often due to cultural norms, may provide temporary peace but leads to unresolved underlying tensions in marriages.

From the CTI perspective, this finding underscores the enactment frame, where communication practices enact the couple's shared marital identity. Open dialogue and boundary setting reflect relational alignment, while avoidance or disrespect undermines the enactment of a stable shared identity. Thus, conflict resolution strategies are not merely behaviors but identity performances that strengthen or weaken marital stability.

#### **4.3.4 Influence of communication on marital stability**

The study established that communication is at the core of marital stability in Bibiani Municipality. Positive patterns such as expressing love, practicing honesty, and active listening contributed to deeper emotional connection, trust, and shared identity, thereby sustaining marital stability. Conversely, ineffective patterns such as sarcasm, dominance, and frequent misunderstandings introduced relational tensions that could potentially destabilize marriages if left unaddressed.

This is in line with Mensah (2020), who argued that communication is the backbone of marital satisfaction in African contexts, where verbal and non-verbal cues hold significant meaning. Similarly, Osei & Kwakye (2022) highlighted that honesty and openness remain predictors of marital endurance in Ghana. However, this study's findings partially contrast with Harrison & Clarke (2023), who found that while communication is crucial, socioeconomic factors such as financial stress also play equally significant roles in determining marital stability.

Through the CTI lens, this overall influence reflects the personal frame of identity, where each partner's self-concept as a spouse is shaped and validated through communication. Stable marriages thrive when communication aligns personal, relational, enactment, and communal frames, creating coherence in identity.

Conversely, misalignments in these frames, often caused by poor communication, result in relational conflict and instability.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study, conclusions drawn and recommendations made following the outcome of the study.

#### 5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore communication patterns within marital relationships among couples in the Bibiani Municipality to discern how they affected marital stability. The study adopted a qualitative research approach with the research design being hermeneutic phenomenological design. Twenty-five couples were purposely sampled for the study and data was collected using an interview guide. Data was manually analysed thematically, with the exception of participants' demographic data which was analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages.

#### 5.2 Key Findings of the Study

The following were the key findings of the study:

1. Expression of love and honesty were the main communication patterns that couples in stable marriage exhibited in the Bibiani Municipality. Expressing love daily through gestures like leaving thoughtful notes or giving unexpected hugs, and also supporting each other's goals and celebrating achievements were among the things couples do to ensure stable marriage.
2. Ineffective communication patterns also manifested among couples experiencing marital stability as passive aggressiveness, frequent misunderstandings and dominance or interruptions. Instead of addressing

issues openly, couples used sarcasm or humor or silent treatment to express frustration. On frequent misunderstandings, couples often misinterpreted each other's words, tone or intentions, leading to unnecessary conflicts and arguments. On dominance, partners who dominated conversations and frequently interrupted the other prevented their spouse from fully expressing themselves, leading to feelings of frustration and being unheard.

3. Increased mutual respect and empathy and understanding were the main roles active listening played in fostering positive communication among couples. By attentively engaging with each other's thoughts and feelings, partners demonstrated that they valued each other's perspectives and validated each other's experience. On empathy or understanding, by truly engaging in each other's feelings and perspectives, partners felt valued, understood, and secure in sharing their vulnerabilities, and this deepened their emotional connection, fostering mutual empathy and strengthening their bond.
4. Majority of couples in the Bibiani Municipality resolved conflict through open and honest dialogue, respectful, non-confrontational communication and setting and respecting boundaries. Couples benefited from directly and transparently addressing their issues, which helped build trust and avoid misunderstanding. Using active listening to express their concerns without criticism, couples resolved conflicts and this fostered marital stability. When couples established clear guidelines, they managed emotions effectively and this also contributed to the stability of their marriage.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The prominence of love and honesty as communication patterns suggests that marital stability is less about grand gestures and more about consistent, intentional acts that

reaffirm commitment. These daily affirmations of care and transparency cultivate a climate of trust and emotional security, which shields the relationship from gradual erosion and fosters long-term resilience.

The presence of ineffective communication patterns, even among couples in stable marriages, underscores that stability does not mean the absence of conflict but rather the ability to navigate challenges without allowing them to destabilize the union. This implies that couples may sustain stability despite communication flaws, provided they have compensatory mechanisms such as reconciliation strategies or shared values that outweigh the destructive effects of miscommunication.

The role of active listening in enhancing respect and empathy demonstrates that communication in marriage is not simply about exchanging words but about affirming the humanity and dignity of the partner. This indicates that the transformative power of listening lies in its capacity to deepen intimacy, making emotional validation and empathy central to the sustainability of healthy marital relationships.

Conflict resolution approaches based on openness, respect, and boundary-setting suggest that the stability of marriage hinges more on how couples respond to disagreements than on the frequency of conflicts themselves. This means that effective conflict management strategies not only prevent disputes from escalating but also become opportunities for reinforcing mutual trust, thereby strengthening the foundation of the marriage.

#### **5.4 Implications for Counselling**

Based on the findings and conclusion the following are some implications for counselling;

1. Marital counsellors should focus on teaching couples effective communication skills such as active listening, empathy and respectful dialogue. This includes training couples to avoid passive aggressive behaviour and interruptions, and to practice open and honest conversations to build a deeper emotional connection and resolve conflicts constructively.
2. Marital counsellors should incorporate strategies for non-confrontational conflict resolution into their sessions. Techniques that help couples manage disagreements without escalating tensions or damaging their relationship can enhance marital stability. Emphasis should be placed on maintain respect and setting clear boundaries during conflicts.
3. Marital counsellors should be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences in communication styles. Tailoring counselling approaches to accommodate diverse cultural norms and values can improve the relevance and effectiveness of communication training for couples from different backgrounds.
4. Marital counsellors should encourage couples to establish regular check-ins to discuss their emotions, concerns and relationship dynamics. This check-ins can help prevent misunderstandings and maintain ongoing dialogue, ensuring that issues are addressed before they escalate.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

Following the outcome of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The study revealed that expression of love and honesty were the main communication patterns that couples in stable marriage exhibited in the Bibiani Municipality. To build and maintain stable marriages, it is important for pastors and imams to encourage couples in the Bibiani Municipality to consistently express love and honesty in their communication. This can be achieved through

relationship counselling programmes that teach couples effective ways to openly express affection and truthfulness in their daily interactions.

2. To address the ineffective communication patterns like passive aggressiveness, frequent misunderstandings and dominance or interruptions among couples in stable marriages, it is important for pastors, church elders and imams in the Bibiani Municipality to provide targeted interventions like reflective dialogue and nonviolent communication that promote healthier communication practices. Couples should be guided in developing skills for identifying and resolving misunderstandings in a constructive way.
3. To enhance positive communication among couples through active listening, church leaders and imams should encourage couples in the Bibiani Municipality to cultivate mutual respect, empathy and understanding their daily interactions.
4. To support couples in resolving conflicts through open and honest dialogue, respectful communication, and clear boundaries, it is important to promote practices that reinforce these communication patterns. Couples should be encouraged by their pastors and imams in the Bibiani Municipality to engage in regular relationship-enhancement activities such as counselling sessions, where they can refine skills for maintaining respectful and non-confrontational conversations.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Guide for Participants**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on communication patterns and their impact on marital stability among couples in the Bibiani Municipality. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how the ways in which couples communicate contribute to the stability of their marriages. Your insights and experiences are invaluable to this study.

#### **SECTION A**

1. Gender?
2. Age?
3. Number of years in marriage?
4. Occupation/profession?

#### **SECTION B**

PREVALENT COMMUNICATION PATTERNS EXHIBITED BY COUPLES IN  
STABLE MARRIAGE (Empathy and Love)

1. How do couples in stable marriages express their love and affection for each other through communication:
2. Can you describe some common non-verbal communication cues that couples in stable marriages use to convey understanding and support?
3. How do couples in stable marriages navigate difficult conversations without escalating into conflict?
4. What are some specific verbal communication strategies that couples in stable marriages employ to maintain a healthy relationship?
5. Can you provide examples of how couples in stable marriages engage in active collaboration and decision-making through communication?

## COUPLES' VIEW ON INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PATTERN

(Emotional Disconnect and Avoidance)

1. How does criticism typically impact the overall dynamics of a couple's relationship?
2. Can you describe some common triggers or situations that tend to lead to criticism in a couple's communication?
3. What are some verbal and non-verbal cues that indicate when criticism is present in a couple's communication?
4. How do couples recover from instances of criticism in their communication and rebuild trust?
5. Can you discuss the potential long-term consequences of repeated instances of criticism in a couple's communication?

## THE ROLE OF ACTIVE LISTENING AS A COMMUNICATION PATTERN

AMONG COUPLES (Enhanced Empathy and Understanding)

1. How does active listening contribute to creating a safe and supportive environment in a couple's communication?
2. What are some practical techniques or strategies that couples can use to improve their active listening skills?
3. Can you provide examples of how active listening helps couples understand each other's perspectives during conflicts?
4. How does active listening enhance empathy and emotional connection between partners?
5. In what ways does active listening foster effective problem-solving and constructive communication in a couple's relationship?

## HOW COUPLES RESOLVE CONFLICT THROUGH COMMUNICATION

(Open and Honest Dialogue and Collective Problem-Solving)

1. Can you describe the typical steps or phases couples go through when attempting to resolve conflicts through communication?
2. What techniques or strategies do successful couples use to de-escalate conflicts during communication?
3. How do couples balance expressing their own needs and concerns while also validating their partner's perspective during conflict resolution discussions?
4. Can you discuss the importance of negotiation and compromise in conflict resolution between couples?
5. How do couples in long-lasting relationships maintain open lines of communication during and after conflict resolution to prevent future conflicts?



## APPENDIX B

### Sample Introductory Letter



3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2024

The Church of Pentecost  
P. O. Box 60  
Western North-Bibiani

Dear Sir/Madam,

#### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

I write to introduce to you **Mr. Agyei Samson**, the bearer of this letter, with student ID number **8230170017** who is pursuing a Master of Philosophy Degree Programme, in the Department of Counselling Psychology of the University of Education, Winneba.

As part of the programme, he is conducting research on the topic: "**Exploring Communication Pattern on Marital Stability Among Couples in the Bibiani Municipality.**"

He needs to administer questionnaire to enable him gather information for his data analysis and he has chosen to conduct this exercise in your outfit.

I would be grateful if he is given the needed assistance.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mrs. Nyuiemedi Agordzo Edoh-Torgah".

**Mrs. Nyuiemedi Agordzo Edoh-Torgah, Ph.D TIC**  
**Ag. Head of Department**

